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2035

MONOGRAPH

# Indoctrinating Minds

## A Case Study of Bangladesh

YVETTE CLAIRE ROSSER



# Indoctrinating Minds

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Published 2004 by

*Rupa & Co*

7/16, Ansari Road, Daryaganj,  
New Delhi 110 002

in association with Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi,  
a non-governmental public policy think tank working in  
the area of economy, security, politics and governance.

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Typeset in PalmSprings by  
Nikita Overseas Pvt. Ltd.  
1410 Chiranjiv Tower,  
43 Nehru Place  
New Delhi 110 019

Printed in India by  
Rekha Printers Pvt Ltd,  
A-102/1 Okhla Industrial,  
Area, Phase-II,  
New Delhi-110 020

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# List of Acronyms

BCL	– Bangladesh Chhatra Dal
BCU	– Bangladesh Chhatra Union
BJP	– Bharatiya Janata Party
BNP	– Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BSTB	– Bangladesh School Textbook Board
CPI-M	– Communist Party of India-Marxist
HRCB	– Human Rights Commission Bangladesh
ICM	– Islami Constitution Movement
ISI	– Inter-Services Intelligence
JCD	– Jatiyatsadi Chhatra Dal
KKK	– Ku Klux Klan
NCTB	– National Curriculum and Textbook Board
NGOs	– Non-governmental Organisations
OIC	– Organisation of Islamic Countries
PBUH	– Peace be Upon Him
PMED	– Primary and Mass Education Division
PPP	– Pakistan People's Party



*If the clock were turned back, it would not be Mujib alone who was guilty. Later Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, who was put in power after Mujib's assassination, and General Ziaur Rahman who followed him, put the seal on it all. All this—resulting in corrupt, unresponsive and effete administration ... had the most disastrous consequences for Bangladesh.*

— ANTHONY MASCARENHAS



## Introduction:

### The Devolution of High School History

The lush and tranquil rivers of eastern Bengal were inspiration for the lyrical, mystical poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, the winner of the Nobel Prize in 1913. The tale of the violent birth of Bangladesh in 1971—blood running deep red through dark green paddies—inspired a protest poem by the American Beat poet Alan Ginsburg. The place that Richard Nixon almost bombed and Henry Kissinger called the world's “basket case”, Bangladesh is a country of vibrant cultural expressions and brilliant colours. High-minded intellectuals, independent-minded women, three growing seasons, wide rivers, ancient hills, verdant plains, expansive beaches, an abiding love of music and poetry, perfectly laid-out tidy villages where homes and fences and furniture are woven from wicker and bamboo—

Bangladesh is a country of 143,998 square kilometers<sup>1</sup> or 55,598 square miles<sup>2</sup>, filled with 138 million very politicized citizens.<sup>3</sup>

This is a story that is so disputed it can't be told. It is a story about human suffering and valour that created a nation based on high ideals of brotherhood, self-determination, and song. This study takes multiple variables into consideration, such as media reports, interviews conducted in Bangladesh, and, in particular, looks at official publications by the Government of Bangladesh, such as textbooks. It discusses how the history of the genocide, the bravery and camaraderie of the Liberation War of 1971 is in jeopardy of being obscured. This study seeks to understand what has been termed "a collective loss of memory in Bangladesh", which, it is claimed, was orchestrated by years of overt military coercion and is promoted by the accelerating influence of Islamisation.

Though there are some striking similarities, the situation regarding the politics of the historiography in Bangladesh is quite different than in Pakistan. In Bangladesh, the textbooks were subjected to similar pressures as in Pakistan, with two military dictators during sixteen years attempting to guide the historical narrative and hence, they believed, the political and psychological direction of the people. Following the civil war, the four provinces in what was left of (West) Pakistan were given some leeway to write regional histories, for example, biographies of pre-approved Sindhi and/or Balouchi heroes were included in textbooks. Regardless of this façade of decentralization, since the breakup of the country in 1971, all textbooks in Pakistan

must be approved by the centralized authority at the Curriculum Wing in Islamabad, though they are published by the regional textbook boards. In contrast, Bengalis have a long tradition of intellectualism; because of this, the overt pressures of the military regimes were resisted in a manner that is not reported to have happened in Pakistan.

The system in Bangladesh is even more centralized than in Pakistan since all the textbooks and curriculum directives not only originate in Dhaka, but are also published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). Perhaps because of this, in Bangladesh there was a greater sense of us against them—as the years of military rule dragged on, 1975-1990. Textbooks in Bangladesh were altered by decree during that decade and a half, but selectively, not drastically. In contrast, in Pakistan, during the years of General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship, 1977-1988, textbooks were completely altered to promote fundamentalist Islamic perspectives glorifying worldwide jihad. There was no scope for the textbook boards in the provinces of (West) Pakistan to impact the narrative as it emanated exclusively from Islamabad. In Dhaka, the NCTB was the solitary source, and hence, if there was an entrenched resistance against authoritarianism, a resulting slow-down regarding historical revisions may have resulted.

In today's Bangladesh, since the return of democracy in 1991, the polity is almost evenly split between the two contesting political parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). For the past thirteen years, 1990-2003, during uninterrupted democratic processes, political pressures to change the historical

narrative have been dealt with differently than when the staff at the NCTB in Dhaka resisted, or at least resented, the educational mandates issued by military dictators during the late seventies and eighties. When the Awami League came to power in 1996 after a two-decade hiatus, they found a willing group of intellectuals at the NCTB who eagerly organized a rewrite of the history textbooks. When the BNP again returned to power in 2001 after a six-year stint as the Opposition, they found employees at the NCTB who were more than happy to immediately comply with the directives of the BNP/Jamaat-i-Islami coalition government. The textbooks were altered within a few weeks of the October 2001 election, with no discernable objections by the NCTB staff, those who were not purged by the BNP immediately upon taking power. A news report, "Govt. making frantic efforts" concerning the new textbooks was published in *Holiday*, a Dhaka weekly, dated November 23, 2001.<sup>4</sup> The journalist, Ghulam Ahad wrote,

The new government's decision to make some changes in the contents of a number of textbooks at the eleventh hour was likely to cause unscheduled delay in printing, but strict monitoring by the Education Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office may be effective in ensuring the printing of the textbooks within the desired time.

The government of Sheikh Hasina made some changes in the contents of school textbooks to incorporate the Awami League's view of the history of the War of Liberation. The changed texts described Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Father of the Nation,

which was not endorsed by the post-1975 governments. Besides, the changes under Hasina's government did not recognise Major Ziaur Rahman, who eventually became President of Bangladesh and founded the BNP, as the declarer of independence in March, 1971.

When the BNP came back to power in October, prior to the beginning of the printing of textbooks, the government of Khaleda Zia decided to undo the changes incorporated during the AL regime. The government also made some changes in some key posts in the NCTB.

During the years that the military was in control of the sources of power, from 1975-1990, the bureaucrats at the NCTB may have resisted autocracy, at least, as described to me in interviews in 1999, they held fond memories of resistance to intellectual hegemony. I was told that during military rule Bangladeshi scholars at the Bangladesh School Textbook Board (BSTB), as the NCTB was known at that time, carefully deliberated over mandated changes—they didn't necessarily leap to comply. There is a long tradition of resistance to authoritarianism in Bangladesh, for instance, when marshal law was declared by the Pakistani General Yahya Khan in 1969, the Bengali chief justice refused to swear in the martial law administrator and almost all the civil servants in Dhaka went on strike.

Now, due to the vacillating nature of the political dispensation, half the employees at most institutions and half the bureaucrats in Bangladesh are divided along BNP versus Awami League lines. Because of this, the contents of

textbooks depend on which party is in power. Hopefully, it will just be a matter of time until the pendulum swings again and the famous "Bengali resistance mentality" will be resuscitated and dispassionate scholars will rise to resist and contest the unchecked politicization of historiography that now dominates the NCTB in Dhaka.

Ironically, as will be seen in this study, though each party eagerly appropriates the story of the nation as their own creation, neither side has been able to write textbooks that tell the on-going history of Bangladesh. Due to irreconcilable controversies, the post-independence history of the country is so highly contested that it is frozen in time. Attempting to abbreviate that unspeakable post-1971 history from a non-partisan, straightforward stance, I will very briefly go into what happened to East Pakistanis after they gained their independence and became Bangladeshis, following decades of cultural and political turbulence. The conflicts began in 1948, just months after independence, when the Father of Pakistan, M.A. Jinnah declared an "Urdu Only" policy, effectively announcing that the Bengali language was of secondary importance, even though more than half the citizens in United Pakistan spoke Bengali as their native tongue. There were numerous violent protests through the years, 1948-1971, that ultimately resulted in a civil war. The Liberation War began on March 25, 1971 when the Pakistani Army arrested Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman, the political head of the Awami League who had won the nation-wide elections held in December 1970, the results of which had been cancelled by the military rulers. On that night in March, there was a bloody crackdown on the

citizens of East Pakistan by the Pakistani Army, initiating nine months of gruesome violence. The Bangladeshis, of course, consider the massacres of March 25, 1971 to be the pivotal event that initiated the war. The West Pakistanis consider that the war began on November 21, 1971 when Pakistani troops clashed with Indian troops on the West Bengal/East Pakistan border. The Indians think that the war began on December 4, the day after Pakistan preemptively bombed Indian airbases in the western part of India. Whether the war lasted nine months or eleven days, at the end of the conflict there were ten million refugees hovelled in West Bengal and Assam who had to be repatriated. The people of East Pakistan had withstood nine months of violent oppression and emerged, with the help of India, as an independent country.

It was through the heroic efforts of the *Muktijuddho* (freedom fighters/guerilla forces) along with the Bangladeshi government in exile, and of course the logistical and financial support of India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, that Bangladesh was born on December 16, 1971 when the Pakistani Army surrendered to the "combined forces"—a euphemism for the Indian Army's eleven-day slice across East Bengal with the rag-tag *Muktijuddho*. Freedom was won with tremendous bloodshed and personal and collective sacrifice on the part of the people of East Bengal. Especially traumatic, as far as the future governance and leadership of the nation was concerned, was the selective and systematic murder of intellectuals on the night of December 14. As the Indian Army, along with the *Muktijuddho* forces approached Dhaka, professors,

doctors, economists, and other intellectuals and professionals were kidnapped from their homes and hacked to death in the dark of night by *razakars*, Islamic terrorist squads associated with the Jamaat-i-Islami party and supported by the Pakistani Army. On January 9, 1972, the man who had steadfastly led the East Pakistani drive towards autonomy from the mid-sixties until the crackdown in March '71, Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman emerged from nine months of solitary confinement in Pakistan to an independent Bangladesh. He was welcomed home from a brief visit to London by tens of millions adoring enthusiastic citizens of this newly-created nation, Bangladesh.

Mujib may have inspired an independence movement, but the realities of ruling a nation devastated by genocide and natural disasters, a land of rivers with no bridges, no barges, was daunting—not to mention the innumerable sycophants. Mujib and most of his family members<sup>5</sup> were murdered in a military coup on August 15, 1975. Mujib was a hero's hero who inspired a nation into existence, but became somewhat obsessed with power. His assassination came as a shock internationally, because only a few years earlier, he was a hero to the whole world—leading his oppressed people to freedom. Much of his international popularity was due to the publicity generated by the first-ever rock concert for charity, George Harrison's *Concert for Bangladesh* at Madison Square Garden.

After the killing of Mujib and family there was a series of short-lived military coups. Then, on November 7, a few days after the brutal "jail-house killings" of four top Awami League leaders, General Zia came to power in a "Sepoy

uprising", a mutiny among the rank and file of the army. Zia ruled as the Martial Law Administrator until he was elected president in 1978 and founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. He was assassinated in May 1981, after which Vice-President Justice Abdus Sattar, who had been the civilian side of the government under Zia's BNP, took the charge of the country. Abdus Sattar was elected president in November 1981.

At that time, General H.M. Ershad, who had spent the entire war in West Pakistan, and it is rumoured served on firing squads that executed Bengali soldiers, came to power in a bloodless coup on March 24, 1982 when he overthrew President Justice Abdus Sattar, head of the quasi-elected BNP government. After he captured state power, General Ershad ruled with an iron fist for another ten years of military rule. Finally, the accelerating street demonstrations and pro-democracy protests, much less the rampant corruption that characterized his reign, forced Ershad to step down in 1990. At that time, another chief justice came in to oversee the interim government until elections could be held and a new government sworn in. General Ershad spent some time in jail for corruption, but none of the charges seemed to carry much penalty because he remains at the head of the Jatiya Party that he founded in the eighties to support his illegitimate regime following in the strategy of most military rulers who usurp power.

In the first really free and almost fair elections since the 1970 election that brought the Awami League to power in united Pakistan, the BNP headed by General Zia's widow Khaleda Zia, won by a slim margin in 1990. Six years later

at the end of Khaleda's term, the Awami League, headed by Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujib, won by a similarly slim margin in 1996. When Hasina's term expired, the BNP again won the election in October 2001, this time in a coalition with several Islamist parties amid claims of vote rigging. Meant as a guide to the following study that focuses on textbooks, this brief introduction summarizes the post-independence political history of Bangladesh.

# As the Pendulum Swings:

## Revolving History and the Loss of Memory in Bangladesh

Changes in social studies textbooks in Bangladesh provide a dramatic case study of contestations over historiography in the subcontinent. The battles over textbook narratives in Bangladesh epitomize the appropriation and containment of the social studies curriculum by political factions with specific allegiances and agendas. This study about the evolution, or perhaps devolution of historiography in Bangladesh, presents an uneasy, inconclusive example of a multi-dimensional process. Uneasy, because the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 entailed political problems and cultural nationalism very different than events leading to Partition in 1947.<sup>6</sup> Inconclusive, because since the restoration of democracy in 1991, the historical narrative in Bangladesh is unstable and caught in a recurring politicized flux. In Dhaka, the pendulum of historiography is not swinging wildly or hanging in the balance on one side or the other, but flipping

rhythmically back and forth every six years. These variables make any discussion of the politicization of textbooks in Bangladesh an on-going story of a contemporary history that is so disputed that it dare not be retold to school children.

Historiography in Bangladesh is actually quite straightforward, if bi-polar. Changes in the historical narrative occurred in two manifestations: the Awami League version versus the military/BNP/Jamaat version. The first edition of the first rewrite occurred right after independence in 1972-73 when a team of scholars sympathetic to the Awami League created a distinctly Bangladeshi historical narrative. This version of history personified "Bengalee Nationalism"<sup>7</sup> and described the rest of the world through that lens. The Awami League undertook another overhaul of the story of the nation when they returned to power in 1996, after a 21 year hiatus. In the late 90s, noted historians, scholars and journalists were enlisted in public committees to discuss the textbooks and to bring the narrative back in line with the first manifestation of historiography in independent Bangladesh, represented by the Awami League version based on "Bengalee Nationalism", created in 1973-75 and subsequently disrupted by the same anti-Indianness that dictates the discourse in Pakistani textbooks which were, and still are, also impacted by military prerogatives.

The 1996-97, Bangladeshi historical rewrite, orchestrated by the newly reelected Awami League was to counteract the second manifestation of changes in historiography in Bangladesh implemented between 1976-1990, characterized by several controversial omissions and additions that occurred in textbooks during two decades of cantonment

directed mandates. During this period, history was subject to the influences of military dictatorships. A word here or there, a few paragraphs, a change of focus, each alteration made by the military rulers had deep social and political implications. Since the restoration of democracy in 1991, these two manifestations of historiography—the Awami League version versus the rendition that represents the military/BNP/Jamaat-i-Islami combine are in a contest for validity, using the malleable medium of the nation's textbooks as trophies.

The chronology of the evolution of textbooks in Bangladesh can be classified in four stages. The first textbooks were of course, East Pakistani, representative of Pakistani historical narratives in the fifties and sixties—Islam-centric but not overly anti-Hindu.<sup>8</sup> In this telling, the story of the creation of Pakistan is based in central India and Lahore. The eastern wing is given some credit in the grand narrative of the creation of the nation—several Bengalis such as A.K. Fazlul Haque who had first raised the Pakistan issue in Lahore, and of course, the Muslim League was founded in Dhaka.<sup>9</sup> Textbooks of the Pakistani period did not adequately credit East Bengal with its cultural longevity or its contributions to nation building. Modern history focused more on the Western wing and central India. East Bengal was tacked on to the two-nation theory, but as was later pointed out in the 1973 era Bangladeshi textbooks, “there is no ‘B’ in Pakistan”.

The second stage in the chronology of historiography in Bangladesh is represented by the Mujib-era textbooks written between 1972 and 1975. In that retelling, the birth

of the nation was not August 14, 1947, this was the day "Bengalees" changed colonial masters from the British to the "West Pakistani imperialists". The greatest story ever told, as far as the newly emergent Bangladeshi historians were concerned, was the heroic birth of the nation, amid great suffering and sacrifice. These early textbooks viewed the history of the subcontinent and rest of the world, from the orientation of East Bengal—through the lens of "Bengalee Nationalism". *Bangabandhu*<sup>10</sup> Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman figured prominently in the recounting of the modern period.

The third period of the evolution of textbooks in Bangladesh occurred during the years of military rule, 1975-1990. The military's influence on textbooks is the second manifestation of historiography, when political power was based in the cantonment. It represents, among other perspectives, a distinctly anti-Indian orientation. Though the goal was similar to the anti-Indianism that characterizes contemporary Pakistani textbooks, the process of historical revisionism in Bangladesh played out very differently than in (West) Pakistan during the same period, when both nations were dominated by military dictatorships. In Pakistan, the power exerted by political and social pressures on textbooks were far more effective and destructive.

Immediately after the split up of East and West Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the prime minister<sup>11</sup> of a now truncated nation sought to have India written out of the ancient and medieval history of the subcontinent in retaliation for India's role in furthering the independence of Bangladesh. During the following decade in Pakistan, General Zia-ul Haq's

Islamisation campaign had a draconian influence on the textbooks that began to glorify jihad, promote discrimination against non-Muslims, and other xenophobic theories.<sup>12</sup> In Bangladesh, after the massacre of Sheikh Mujib along with his family members, and another dozen friends and colleagues late at night on August 15, 1975 and the subsequent take over of the country by the military, the historical narrative in textbooks was altered with a similar mandate as in Pakistan, to Islamise and de-Indianise.<sup>13</sup>

The results of the overhauls of historiography were not as thorough<sup>14</sup> in Bangladesh as compared to Pakistan. In Bangladesh, just the recent events, as narrated in textbooks, were altered to suit the military leaders. The stories of the ancient and medieval periods, as formulated by "Bengalee Nationalist" historians in 1973-75, were not significantly changed. Alterations in textbooks in Bangladesh were implemented in a more haphazard process than in Pakistan. But eventually, during revisions orchestrated by Gen. Zia-ur Rahman in 1977 and Gen. H.M. Ershad in 1984 and 1987, the retelling of the creation of the *Bengalee* nation shifted its stance. The manipulations of the historical record undertaken by the military rulers of Bangladesh are a manifestation that will keep recurring as long as the government changes hands between the BNP and the Awami League, or perhaps until the nation comes of age in a collective sense of accepting the past. The BNP, having their roots in the cantonment, have a sense of history very different than the Awami League's. These two perspectives are counterpoised and irreconcilable. The clear cut divisions are as chasm-like as the battle-lines about the interpretation

of the history of the subcontinent that have been drawn between Indian Marxist historians and Indian nationalist historians. The debate in Bangladesh is as furious, if perhaps theoretically less tangential than in India.

The fourth period of the politics of historiography in Bangladesh is currently playing out. Since the restoration of electoral democracy in 1990, the textbooks available for Bangladeshi school children have been significantly altered twice, at six-year intervals. After the BNP won the first election in 1990, they didn't bother to alter the existing textbooks because they reflected the military/mullah orientation. In contrast, when the Awami League was elected in 1996, after 21 years out of power, they energetically rewrote the textbooks to correct what they perceived as two decades of history distorted by non-democratic imperatives.

The cycle continued in 2001, when the BNP returned again to power and they meteorically revoked the historical narratives interjected into the textbooks by the Awami League, which the students had been studying for the past six years. In October 2001, the BNP government went to work immediately to reinstate their version that had been in vogue from 1977, with the publication of the first edition of General Zia's textbooks. This is the recurring aspect of the military manifestation. When the BNP is in power, they promote the version that was in use during the years of military rule. Only this time, on obtaining state control in 2001, the BNP/Jamaat combine have gone even further to distort the implications of various events in the history of

the nation, especially the murder of the intellectuals on December 14, 1971.

When the Awami League came to power in 1996, Sheikh Hasina worked tirelessly to put her father *Bangabandhu* Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman<sup>15</sup> back into the historical record. At times it seemed to be her single-minded passion. In the late nineties, there was much fanfare and media coverage about historiography. The Awami League conducted a very public rewrite of the history textbooks to “correct the excesses of military dictators”.

A seasoned employee of the NCTB with over twenty years of service, who retired three years after the Awami League came to power, described this process. He was critical of the narrative used in the 1980s because it depoliticized the liberation movement. In this way, Sheikh Mujib’s efforts and the contributions of other statesmen were made tangential to the creation of Bangladesh and the historical focus is centered on the military’s prowess and courage. In an interview in 1999, this informed former employee of the NCTB told me that

This situation ... changed ... when the ...[AL] government was voted to power. The new government formed an eight-member committee with senior university teachers and journalists to rewrite the history of Bangladesh, especially the liberation movement, *truly* [emphasis added]. Accordingly, the committee reviewed and modified the relevant portions of about 20 textbooks on Bangla, History, Social Science and Civics, at Primary, Junior Secondary,

and Secondary Levels. NCTB extended all out cooperation in this respect.<sup>16</sup>

He added, during the 1999 interview, "And these books are now being used in the schools." But now, as mentioned, six years after the Awami League recaptured Bangladeshi history in 1996, the political situation flipped once again when the BNP returned to power in October 2001. Within weeks of taking office, new editions of the NCTB textbooks had been readied. The NCTB published the renewed BNP genre textbooks post haste, only a month after the elections—scant time to form highbrow editorial advisory committees.

This indicates that for the BNP and their Jamaat allies, textbooks had become a high priority. The mandated changes were very specific. Relevant portions modified six years earlier by the Awami League were immediately altered. Primary to the BNP's agenda was to take "Bangabandhu" back out and put "General Zia" back in. Of course, there is the re-inclusion of Zia in the narrative regarding the almost comical tit for tat about who declared independence on March 25 and 26, 1971. More ominously, for Bangladeshis whose relatives were murdered, is the exclusion in the new BNP sponsored textbooks of the role played by the Jamaat-i-Islami and other fundamentalist organizations that supported *razakars*, Islamic terrorist squads implicated in the murders of intellectuals in Dhaka on December 14, 1971. The controversial sentences that blamed the Jamaat-i-Islami in the Awami League era textbooks were immediately expunged when the Jamaat-i-Islami came to power in a coalition government with the BNP.

When the BNP returned to power in 2001, they immediately and systematically de-Bangabandhuised the textbooks. In *Social Science for Class Nine and Ten*<sup>17</sup>, the prefix “Bangabandhu”, the title of endearment given to Sheikh Mujib, was extracted from the entire textbook. In 1996, “Bangabandhu” had been inserted before almost all references to Mujib, and in many instances had been substituted for the name Mujib, when his story was resurrected by pro-Awami League textbook revision committees. By convention, Awami Leaguers refer to Mujib simply as *Bangabandhu*. Eliminating Bangabandhus, combing the textbooks, would have been time-consuming work were it not for computer programmes that can find and replace in an instant. Between October and November 2001, the NCTB textbooks were revised and de-Bangabandhuised in turbo-speed.

In the newly issued BNP textbooks, Sheikh Mujib is not called “Bangabandhu”. According to a colleague doing research in Bangladesh who carefully looked over the new textbooks, “His name ‘Sheikh Mujib’ or ‘Sheikh Mujibur’ appears often in the chapter on the war of liberation, but the prefix ‘Bangabandhu’ is altogether absent”.<sup>18</sup> According to sources, some staff members at NCTB went through the saved-files of the textbooks, extracting each occurrence of the word “Bangabandhu” ...search ...replace, search... delete. And Bangabandhu was once again posthumously eliminated. However, this time around, because of the more open nature of today’s democratic society, Sheikh Mujib remains in the story, if in a somewhat less exalted level of importance—at least for the next few years. The class IX

and X textbook revised in 2001 by the BNP, uses the word “Bangabandhu” just once, and only then when explaining how the nickname was conferred.

On the occasion of mass reception given to the convicts of the Agratola conspiracy case on 23 February 1969 when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was given the title ‘Bangabandhu’ by Tofael Ahmed on behalf of the people.<sup>19</sup>

Besides the extractions of the honorific prefix Bangabandhu, there were two other significant deletions made by the BNP in October 2001. A descriptive and controversial paragraph added by the Awami League in 1996, blaming the *razakars* and specifically naming the Jamaat-i-Islami as responsible for the deaths of the intellectuals on December 14, 1971 was duly removed from the textbooks after October 2001. These sentences are no longer in the nation’s official historical narrative; neither is a reference to the indemnity ordinance that had pardoned the murderers of Mujib and family.<sup>20</sup> The indemnity ordinance was termed “unfortunate” in an Awami era civics textbook in use between 1996-2001. When the BNP again gained access to the public tools of historical revision, this comment was immediately expunged—since mentioning the indemnity ordinance painted the military in a less than favourable light. Notably, textbooks recently revised by the BNP, make the narrative about General Zia’s radio broadcast of the declaration of independence purposefully vague.

The new editions have re-embraced the view of Bangladeshi nationalism that was promoted by the military regimes. However, the BNP's efforts to vindicate the perpetrators of genocide have gone considerably further than even the former textbooks of Zia and Ershad's periods where the word "*razakar*" still appeared in reference to the murderers of the intellectuals on December 14, 1970. In 1996 era textbooks, the Awami League added "*al-badars*" and "*al-shams*" to the list of collaborators, specifically naming the "*Jamaat-i-Islami*" as culpable in the murder of the intellectuals. The new 2001 genre textbook leaves all of these names out of the narrative and simply blames the deaths of the intellectuals on themselves and on the Pakistani Army. After October 2001, eliminating references to *razakars* and certainly the *Jamaat-i-Islami* was an imperative since former *razakars* and members of the *Jamaat* are now part of the ruling coalition.

The new textbooks were modified so fast that only a word here and there and a few paragraphs could be removed, but the result creates a story more in tune with the BNP and *Jamaat* view of the events and heroes. An important impact of the omissions and extractions is that the genocidal excesses of the infamous collaborators, the *razakars* are ignored and thereby excused. This deflection of guilt by the *Jamaat-i-Islami* was one of the first orders of business for the BNP/Islamists political dispensation that came to power in October 2001.

Differences in the representation of the role of the "invading" or "occupying" Pakistani Army is another of the hotly contested issues. In the quote below, the Pakistani

Army is referred to ironically as the "Hanadar Bahini"<sup>21</sup>, a euphemistic tactic to obscure who the real enemy was in 1971,

After the election of October 1, 2002, Bangladesh is being ruled by a coalition government composed of mainly by BNP and ... Islamic parties. This coalition government had made no bones about declaring their pet agendas. They will soon re-write school textbooks to favor their views. Therefore in the next five years Bangladesh will 'nourish' the mind of young ones. And they will learn that a Hanadar Bahini (an Intruding Force) committed all sorts of crime in 1971. This Hanadar Bahini will be vilified to the maximum. However, if school students are asked who this Hanadar Bahini is composed of, then we will see some blank stares, undoubtedly.<sup>22</sup>

In textbooks published by the Awami League right after independence, the Pakistani Army is referred to as the "aggressor Pakistani invaders" or the "occupation forces". They are several times called "murderous Khans"<sup>23</sup>. There was no doubt who the bad guy was. These textbooks did not acknowledge any violence against non-Bengalis during the war, but they stressed the terrible devastation Bengalis suffered at the hands of the "Paki hoards" and the "collaborator *razakars*". No textbooks have admitted the attacks against non-Bengalis, but the description and the culpability of the collaborators is an issue that swings wildly with each change in government.

## Textbooks and Popular Memory

Finding copies of old textbooks in Bangladesh was challenging. I was able to locate a few textbooks from the period between January 1972, when Bangladesh emerged as a nation-state, and August 1975, when Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman, et al were assassinated.<sup>24</sup> I discovered an even greater scarcity of textbooks published during Zia's period, between 1977<sup>25</sup> and 1981. After a fairly exhaustive search in old bookstores, libraries, and scrap paper bazaars, two textbooks from the Mujib period were found. One was an edition from 1973, reprinted in 1975 and the other, based on the 1973 version, had been reprinted up until 1977.<sup>26</sup> There were two pages missing in the 1977 reprint concerning the modern period, they may have been torn out. They had been removed with a sharp instrument. The pages missing concerned the period immediately before the crackdown on March 25.

It is not unheard of that when one political party replaces another, pages will be torn out of the old social studies textbooks if there is not enough time to replace the textbooks

published under the previous political party's influence. This happened to an English language Reader in the Indian state of Rajasthan written in 1998 when there was a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in charge of the state. The *Course Reader for Class Twelve*, with English essays included the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, R.S. Sharma, Jawaharlal Nehru, and controversially one by Deendayal Upadhyaya, chapter four, *Democracy and Political Parties*, beginning on page twenty-nine. Deendayal is held in high esteem by the BJP because he was instrumental in founding the party that led to the growth of the BJP. He was murdered mysteriously, but is considered an intellectual of the Sangh Parivar.

When the Congress won back control of the state government in Rajasthan, they continued to use the same English reader the following year, but the essay by Deendayal was torn out and the title crossed out of the table of contents. The next essay *My Life and Mission* by Swami Vivekananda began at the bottom of the last page of the grammar and writing exercises following the Deendayal essay and the remaining questions were marked through several times with a blue pen. The Deendayal essay discussed the democratic process and was not about any particular political party. Though his essay was truly nonpartisan, his name was not wanted in a textbook published under the Congress party. When the Congress returned to power in that state they simply sliced out that chapter thereby using up the remaining textbooks before republishing them—a practical, if political, solution. This may have been the case regarding the missing pages in the

1977 era textbook, and was discussed by several Bangladeshis who examined the textbook.

I found no books published between 1977 and 1981. But there are many references to a textbook published in 1977, after Zia had consolidated his power. This is the textbook that gained notoriety, beginning what would become an anti-Awami League remodification process, representative of the second manifestation of historiography in Bangladesh that was cantonment based. In this edition, Zia was described as declaring independence, proclaiming himself, even back then when he was a Major, as the "President of Bangladesh". Though I never located an old copy of that book I made inquiries about it from the staff at the NCTB in Dhaka. There was a lot of fear and coercion in the early days of military rule, no one talks much about them. But the rumours have become the stuff of popular memory.

I found two textbooks from Ershad's period, 1984 and revised in 1987. A few years after Ershad took control following Zia's assassination in 1981<sup>27</sup>, the textbooks were revised, and some of the excesses of the Zia historical narrative were somewhat corrected. In 1977, no one dared to oppose the military. Zia was popular with the masses if ruthless with the Opposition. By 1984, the employees at NCTB felt more able to write history, though they were still constrained by the military authorities—not many "corrections" could be made without taking a risk.

To ascertain what those hard to locate, out-of-print textbooks published during the Zia years may have said, I interviewed numerous graduate students and other Bangladeshis in their mid-thirties who had used these

textbooks when they were in school. They all told similar stories, based on their memories of their school days. According to them, immediately after 1972, the first textbooks published in the newly formed country, told of economic exploitation—"West Pakistan was the beneficiary of income produced in the East, and foreign aid money was used for development in the West."

Textbooks published immediately after independence described "the violent clashes on Language Day in 1952, after which Bangladeshi nationalism gradually developed". The influence of "pro-Hindu teachers" was not mentioned. The story goes that the "War of Independence began after Sheikh Mujib's Awami League won the majority in the parliamentary elections" but "West Pakistan denied the elections, which was followed by the March 25-26 massacres". The early textbooks glorified the freedom fighters whose "guerrilla warfare wore down the Pakistani army." Mention was made of "wide spread human rights abuses by the Pakistani occupation forces." India's role, during the war, and especially the last two weeks was mentioned in early Bangladeshi textbooks, "but it was not considered to be decisive in liberation on December 16."<sup>28</sup> India's role in funding and training the Mukhti Bahini (liberation army) was "somewhat minimized".

According to my interviewees, in the textbooks published during the years of General Zia's and also General Ershad's military rule, the "help of the Indian Army was barely mentioned." The role of the Muktiyuddha, the guerrilla freedom fighters was altered, and they were referred to as the "Bangladeshi army" which, didn't technically exist in

1971. Particularly, all my interviewees mentioned that the slogan, "*Joy Bangla* was systematically eliminated from the media and textbooks during the eighties". Textbooks published immediately after the war of liberation discussed political and economic exploitation in erstwhile East Pakistan. However, according to an analysis common with many people, one interviewee stated,

In textbooks that were published under the regimes in the late seventies and eighties, while the military rulers of Bangladesh sought to normalize relations with their Islamic neighbor, Pakistan was not criticized explicitly as 'the enemy', and the magnitude of the genocide was not stressed.

The military-influenced editions of the textbooks referred to the Pakistani forces as simply "an anonymous enemy army" or "hanadar" army. Many middle-aged Bangladeshis may harbour resentments for "rape and pillage" perpetrated by the Pakistani Army. However, according to my informants, some among the younger generation may be "unaware that Pakistan was actually 'the enemy'". Some informed Bangladeshis claim that there may be a generation who mistakenly think, because their textbooks become so vague by the late seventies and throughout the eighties, that "the 'Bangladeshi Army' fought the 'Indian Army' to achieve independence".<sup>29</sup>

The textbooks I collected that were published right after independence compared with those published during the military period partially correspond to the critiques of the

informants cited here. It is significant that this is a very common belief among many Bangladeshis. Many related their memories to me, that through the years of military rule, "Bangabandhu's role was diminished," as was "India's contribution to independence", and "the violence and exploitation of the Pakistanis" was also minimized. The two textbooks that I collected from the mid-eighties confirmed much of this assessment.

### **Cultural Nationalism versus Pan-Islamism**

Bangladesh is a majority Muslim country, with a significant, if shrinking Hindu minority—about twenty-five to thirty per cent at the time of Partition in 1947, but less than nine per cent remaining in 2003. The textbooks in Bangladesh are not predicated on an anti-Indian bias as are state sponsored textbooks in Pakistan. The social studies curriculum in Pakistan is premised on creating a national identity that is distinct from India, whereas Bangladeshi textbooks reflect a more pan-South Asian perspective, though completely Bengal-centric.

Among textbooks writers in Dhaka, Gandhi is sometimes given more respect than Jinnah, who is criticized because of his anti-Bengali stance. In NCTB textbooks, Shivaji, a controversial Hindu warrior of western India who almost defeated the Moghul Empire before he was defeated by the British, is represented in Bangladeshi schoolbooks as a brave soldier. In this way, Hindu heroes are not systematically sidelined and maligned as they are in current Pakistani textbooks.<sup>30</sup> Much of the style of the narrative in

Bangladeshi textbooks is based on the model of pre-1965 East Pakistani textbooks, which were not overtly anti-Indian. Pakistani textbooks began to drift towards anti-Indianism after the September 1965 war with India, and took a strong anti-Indian and anti-Hindu turn in 1971, after India was instrumental in helping East Pakistan secede.<sup>31</sup>

In Bangladesh, textbooks created after 1971 narrated events through a lens of Bengali cultural nationalism. Bengali cultural nationalism includes Hindus, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Ram Mohan Roy, who contributed to Bengali literature and society prior to the partition of the subcontinent. Rabindranath Tagore is particularly dear to Bangladeshis. His poetry and songs, "Rabindra Sangit", are sung by Bengali speaking school children, additionally he authored the words and music of the national anthem, *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal). Song is an integral part of Bengali life, and in particular, songs by Rabindranath Tagore are well known. The Muktiyuddho soldiers are remembered for their songs of inspiration, many of them authored by Tagore, sung as they trudged along rice paddies.<sup>32</sup>

Another reason Tagore is popular is because he was banned in Bangladesh in the late 1960s, when West Pakistan was attempting to put down Bengali cultural nationalism that was gaining ground.<sup>33</sup> Many Bangladeshis would agree with what this professor at Dhaka University said,

This one repressive policy enacted by the Pakistani military ruler, Ayub Khan, forbidding the singing of Rabindra Sangit on the radio or in public performances, was the primary motivator that fueled the people of

East Pakistan's demand for autonomy. Depriving the Bengalis of Rabindranath Tagore was one of the most significant events that lead to the War of Liberation.<sup>34</sup>

## Urban Legends and The Rewriting of History

The very first textbooks published after the independence of Bangladesh were pieced together from the earlier East Pakistan editions. The time was short and the resources scant—the books had to come out between January 1972 and the beginning of classes for that year, just a few months later. To accomplish this in early 1972, the history textbooks added a few pages at the end of East Pakistani textbooks about the growth of Bengali nationalism: the problems with Pakistani governance in an unequal power arrangement, the language movement, the Six Point Plan<sup>35</sup> of the Awami League, the independence war, and the return of Mujib after his incarceration.

The very first Bangladeshi textbooks had to be ready in early 1972, just a few months after independence. To accomplish this, they added paragraphs that dwelt with the events leading to the civil war and the ultimate creation of the nation. However, due to time limitations, the textbook authorities did not alter the earlier chapters about ancient, medieval, or colonial India, written during the East Pakistan period. That total rewrite was accomplished within the year before the next school term.

Several Bangladeshi scholars told me a joke that was current right after independence. According to this urban legend, since the new government didn't have time to

produce completely textbooks for the coming school year, they simply appended a short narrative about the birth of the nation, and tacked it on to the end of the story of the creation of Pakistan. To have Bangladeshi-centric books available for the 1972 school year, the textbook publishers simply extracted various pages of the books that glorified Pakistan and “whited-out” Jinnah’s name and inserted the name of “Bangabandhu Mujib-ur Rahman” into the text.

The punch line of this joke told to me by several people goes like this, though Mujib’s name replaced Jinnah’s, because of an oversight made in the rush to get the books out before classes commenced for the school year, the editors neglected to change the date and place of Jinnah’s birth. So it goes, in the first revised edition of Bangladeshi textbooks, Mujib was born in 1875 in Thatta, Sindh in West Pakistan, which would have made him almost a hundred years old in 1972. This supposed and oft-repeated humorous “typo” in the first textbooks may have just been a joke, though it was told to me by several scholars. The only textbooks that I found from this period were dated 1973, and they represented a total rewrite of the tale of East Bengal, not a patched together version described in this humorous aside.

### **The Bengalees vs. the Bangladeshis**

Recent revisions in the social studies curriculum in contemporary Bangladesh reflect the political divisions in that society—an electorate almost evenly split between the Awami League and the BNP. The on-going battle over the highly prized historical narrative provides a fascinating

example of how textbooks are manipulated to serve political prerogatives. Bangladesh was born as a collective sub-national *Bengalee* protest against the political manipulations of cultural symbols by the (West) Pakistani military / mullah combine over the decades. The politicization of culture, religion, education, literature has become an inherent feature of everyday life in Bangladesh. As the historical facts of the War of Liberation are gradually becoming obscured by the politicization of historiography, the passions of the war are being whipped up by those same political forces. Battle lines are drawn as if the war never ended. Perhaps it is because when liberation came, it was more or less handed to Bangladeshis after Pakistan preemptively bombed Indian airbases provoking a declaration of war, after which the Indian Army sliced across erstwhile East Pakistan in eleven days. Though tales of the liberation struggle are said to be sacrosanct they are not so sacred that they are beyond modification to suite the political dispensation. The rhetorical war between who is pro-liberation and who is anti-liberation becomes a shrill battle cry flung across the media by the leaders of the two opposing political parties.

Kuldip Nayar<sup>36</sup> wrote about this phenomenon,

Every time I go to Bangladesh—and I go regularly—I find the country still in the midst of war. The guns of 1971 have stopped long ago but conflicts and tensions have not. The society remains divided from top to bottom. People of Bangladesh can be categorised into two groups: pro-liberation and anti-liberation. The first claims to represent the forces which fought

against Pakistan to create an independent country. It mostly favours Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh. The second group supports Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. Her husband, Zia-ur-Rahman, headed free Bangladesh through a coup.

After 30 years of Independence, who did what during the liberation struggle is getting hazier, but not the prejudices. Some impressions about people—a few may well be true—remain implacable. The worst part is that there is no mood of forgetting and forgiving. The liberation or the anti-liberation label has become such a prized possession that the fakes and failures use it to settle scores politically and, worse, violently. The cleavage, really speaking, is like India's caste system, with its prejudices and biases. Appointments, transfers and even allocations of funds are made on the basis of who was on which side.

After the genocidal upheaval that culminated with the birth of the nation in 1971, there was virtually a complete rewriting of the textbooks based on the needs and views of the newly created country. The story of the emergence of the nation changed from a pro-Jinnah Pakistani perspective to one featuring the bravery of the Bangladeshi freedom fighters. The new version emphasized the role of Bangabandhu<sup>37</sup> Sheikh Mujib as the Father of the Country rather than Quaid-e-Azam<sup>38</sup> M.A. Jinnah, who, instead of being a hero to the Muslims of the subcontinent, was seen as prejudiced against the welfare of the Bengalis.<sup>39</sup>

In this first rewrite of Bangladeshi history, the tale of the origin of the country was entwined with the life of Sheikh Mujib. He was the father of the nation<sup>40</sup>, the national hero who along with other brave East Pakistanis, stood up to West Pakistani exploitation while students in the fifties, opposing the Urdu language policy that discriminated against Bangla. Mujib and others were arrested several times, went on hunger strikes, and founded political parties. The decades of activism that led to the growth of Bengali nationalism and the liberation movement were narrated primarily through the experiences of Mujib, as well as several other famous freedom fighters. Though other heroes were acknowledged, it was Mujib's life which served as the hook upon which the "Bengalee nationalist" narrative was hung in the textbooks published between 1973 and 1977.<sup>41</sup>

The retelling of the all-important Language Movement mentioned Mujib's activities during his student activism days. Then in the sixties when he, along with other noteworthy Bengali nationalists, pushed forward the "Six Point Plan" demanding more autonomy for East Pakistan, Mujib's efforts and struggles were highlighted. Thus, as in most countries, the story of the nation was told through the contributions and adventures, steps and missteps of the founding fathers and mothers.<sup>42</sup>

In these narratives, the Agartala conspiracy case is highlighted as Pakistani treachery against Sheikh Mujib and other key civil servants and army personnel. The Pakistani government charged them with conspiring with India to help East Pakistan secede. As the political situation became

less and less stable, the Pakistani government was forced to drop the case. Bangladeshi textbooks and all Bangladeshis swear that Sheikh Mujib was innocent and had not conspired to bifurcate the nation. In this instance, his loyalty to Pakistan is praised—a strange insistence of presumed innocence when that particular crime, if true in a clandestine way, would in the final telling be something to point to with pride as it led to the creation of the nation. But it was, his die-hard supporters say, his innocence and faithfulness that gave Sheikh Mujib and other East Pakistani politicians the power to force the West Pakistani military junta to allow free and fair elections.<sup>43</sup>

Mujib's Bengali coalition won the majority of the votes. Instead of becoming the prime minister, after many delays and much intrigue orchestrated by General Yahya Khan in cahoots with Z.A. Bhutto, Mujib was arrested on March 25, 1971. That night, the Pakistani Army unleashed a siege of bloody terror on Dhaka. They encircled police stations, set fire to whole neighbourhoods and gunned down the inhabitants when they fled from the flames. They sent tanks on the Dhaka University campus—the first building fired upon was Jagannath Hall, the Hindu Student Hostel. Fifty thousand people were murdered in that night alone. Dhaka burned for days. Gen. Tikka Khan, along with his colleagues in the Pakistani Army such as Gen. Rao Farman Ali organized the March 25 crackdown called "Operation Searchlight".

Across erstwhile East Pakistan, a blood bath reached even the remotest villages. Pakistani soldiers carried out rape, looting, extortion, beatings, and mass murder for the

nine months. When independence came on December 16, 1971, Bangladesh entered the comity of nations a ravaged, devastated land of seventy-five million displaced, traumatized people. In the first officially rewritten Bangladeshi textbooks published after the birth of the nation, this was the story—the wreckage of their country and the heroism of Sheikh Mujib.

The first few textbooks written after Bangladesh was created incorporated a more regional focus in the discourse about the ancient period, the medieval period, and especially the colonial period. There were many similarities, especially in chronology, to East Pakistani textbooks but, embedded in the narratives of all the eras was a foreshadowing, an on-going commentary leading to the final working out, according to Sirajul Islam of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, of the “inevitability of the Bengali nation”.<sup>44</sup>

Within a year after independence, Bangladeshi textbooks had been completely rewritten from the ancient period, through the medieval era, to modern times. The point of view was distinctly Bengali—world events unfolded as they impacted the geographical area of the world now known as Bangladesh. Thus, the Aryans are discussed as noble invaders, whose Rishis brought Sanskrit culture to the subcontinent and hence, the Bengali language. However, the discourse stressed that Bengalis had historically resisted “Aryanisation” and had retained a distinct identity. This historical autonomy facilitated the eventual emergence of Bangladesh as a modern nation state. Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms that had contributed to Bengali cultural consciousness were highlighted in the narrative.

Individual Islamic invaders and Sufis were seen as either relevant or irrelevant in relation to their positive or negative impact on Bengali identity. Events such as the occupation of Sindh by Muhammad bin Qasim, or the destruction of Somnath by Mahmud Ghaznavi, both central to the Pakistani narrative, were not considered historically relevant as they had little impact on East Bengal. Though the story of the new nation moved along the same chronological path as the textbooks of East Pakistan, some heroes and events were tarnished or abbreviated, and new ones were added. The sum total of the narrative was through the lens of the Bengali historians of the newly created nation.

In the rewritten 1973 era textbooks, though Jinnah is credited for rousing Muslims' political identity, his role in the creation of Pakistan is tempered by the fact that he never really considered East Bengal as part of his "Home for Muslims in the Subcontinent".<sup>45</sup> He complained at the time of Partition that he was handed a "moth eaten" nation. He enacted policies that were detrimental to the interests of the eastern wing. The "Bengalee" narrative demonized rather than eulogized him. In 1948, Jinnah announced that Urdu would be the official language of the state and the script in which Bengali is written would be changed to the Nasta'liq, the Perso-Arabised alphabet used for Urdu and other languages spoken in the western wing of the country. The first textbooks in Bangladesh interpreted the creation of Pakistan through the lens of Jinnah's discriminatory policies rather than the wonderful tale of freedom for the Muslims of South Asia, as the textbooks used in erstwhile East Pakistan had once narrated the events.

Controversies about the deeds of various actors characterize not only the differences in historical narratives between nations, but also within countries. This is exemplified by the dispute over who declared independence in Bangladesh. It is a very important issue with the BNP because it gives their founder, General Zia, a connection with the past—in that moment he is on par with the Father of the Nation. Because of the radio broadcasts, he can be seen to be the Father of the Nation, the man who declared independence. This connection is so important to the BNP that a digitalized recording of General Zia's voice from that old radio announcement plays when you open the BNP webpage: "I Major Zia-ur Rahman do hereby declare the independence of Bangladesh."<sup>46</sup> The next section discusses this on-going debate that is at once almost comical and deadly serious.

## Who Declared Independence?

*The myth of Zia's being the declarer of independence was spiced up by his so-called patriotism and transformed into legend what was nothing but an opportunistic gesture on his part. For last 20 years Zia and BNP, through government controlled media, made people to believe that Zia was the key person for our political independence and the independence of Bangladesh is nothing more than an event caused by an unknown major's declaration from the corner of the country. Nothing existed before his declaration and what ensued was but a miracle of God.*

—TITO SCOHEL

The first thing I was told, by the first scholar whom I interviewed in Bangladesh, was that no matter what I read or hear while in Dhaka, "Bangabandhu declared independence first, not General Zia". Anisuzzaman, a respected professor from Dhaka University explained the details of the events of those two days in late March 1971. He alerted me to the controversy. The burning question, who declared independence, Mujib or Zia, is a hot political

potato that is tossed around Dhaka, with different versions of the story popping in and out of Bangladeshi textbooks.

Disputed as it has now become, in the first editions of Bangladeshi textbooks, there was no mention of then Major Zia's now famous and historically controversial declaration of independence. In fact, in the first Bangladeshi textbook published in 1973 and revised thereafter until replaced in 1977, Mujib's declaration of independence on March 25 was not even mentioned. The first textbooks in Bangladesh were silent on this topic. Not only do they fail to give the text of the declaration, but the wireless broadcast is simply not mentioned. However, Mujib's famous "Race Course" speech on March 7 was quoted in full, which ended with an unveiled call for freedom,

Get ready with whatever you have. When we have shed blood we will shed more blood. We will get this country free, insha Allah<sup>47</sup>. This struggle for our freedom, this struggle is the struggle for our independence.

Immediately after this quotation, the 1973 book includes the following sentences, no mention of Zia's now disputed declaration,<sup>48</sup>

The foundation of the military regime was shaken by the non-cooperation movement led by Bangabandhu. Yahya Khan continued discussions with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for ten days till 24 March 1971. As soon as Yahya Khan got ready, on 25th March, he left

Dhaka after ordering the Army to stop forever the struggle of the Bengali nation. On the night of 25th of March the army of Yahya Khan betrayed and arrested Bangabandhu. He was taken to West Pakistan and was imprisoned for a long time and a conspiracy was being crafted to kill him in the name of a trial. On 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971, the military government of Pakistan started a massacre in Dhaka.

The story of Mujib was central to the narrative, but his declaration of independence late at night on March 25, sent out on wireless just before he was arrested, was not included in that first textbook. Though this later became a big issue, in 1973 most people seem to have believed that Mujib's speech on March 7 had already declared independence. In 1973, textbook writers obviously did not feel that this announcement of independence, read several times on the radio by Major Zia and others the day after Mujib was arrested, was important enough to include in that first textbook. Certainly, for those who heard the broadcast there was no doubt that they were Mujib's words. There was no controversy about this in 1973—Zia was a complete nobody, Mujib was the "uncontested father of the nation". Now, of course, Zia supporters see it differently and retroactively read levels of meaning into the event which did not exist at the time.

During the War of Liberation, Zia was made a section commander. In some quarters he is remembered best for his daring raid on the Dhaka cantonment while it was under the control of the Pakistani Army. In the dark of night he

made his way, it is said, to his former home to rescue his wife, Khaleda, who had been left there when he joined the revolutionary forces.

Mrs. Zia declined to accompany her husband, feeling safe in her home guarded by the enemy officers, rather than "on the run with the Freedom Fighters". After the war, General Zia rejected Khaleda for this "betrayal", but was urged by Sheikh Mujib to reconcile with his wife. This is one of the favorite bits of gossip that was told to me many times.<sup>49</sup> This tidbit obviously never made it into the official narrative. However, the notation that Zia is the one who first declared independence was added to the textbooks in 1977, during his stint as military dictator, a process during which Mujib's contributions were sidelined.

Though the BNP would like to own this moment in Bangladeshi history, and though it wasn't even included in the first textbooks that told the tale of the liberation movement, the fact remains that Mujib declared independence first, not Zia. The chronology of the event bespeaks the facts in this simple case. Major Zia had been requested by members of the Awami League to make the broadcast "in Mujib's name". There is no way getting around it—Zia simply read Mujib's statement no matter how hard BNP stalwarts try to ignore this detail. In an environment of partial denial, the legend has grown that Zia is the fearless leader who dared to declare independence. BNP-centric historians still swear by this "fact".

One innuendo about this moment in Bangladeshi history foreshadows the ambitious personality of this military man, the then Major Zia, who had spent most of his adult life at

army bases in West Pakistan. On March 27, the first time he read the declaration, "he did so in the name of Mujib",<sup>50</sup>

Zia re-read this declaration from the same station again on 28th and 29th March. But in both announcements, Zia presented himself as the head of independent Bangladesh. Everybody in the radio station strongly objected to Zia's presumptuous statements. Mr. A.K. Khan also resented Zia's naked ambition and warned him against the dangerous consequences his rashness may precipitate.

Here is the original "Declaration of War by Major Zia on 27 March, 1971" as reproduced on a web site,

....The government of the Sovereign State of Bangladesh  
*On behalf of our Great Leader, the Supreme Commander of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman,* we hereby proclaim the independence of Bangladesh and that the Government headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has already been formed (emphasis added).

It is further proclaimed that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the sole leader of the elected representatives of seventy five million people of Bangladesh and that the government headed by him is the only legitimate government of the people of Independent Sovereign State of Bangladesh, which is legally and constitutionally formed and is worthy of being recognized by all the governments of the world.

I, therefore, appeal on behalf of our Great Leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the governments of all the democratic countries of the world, specially the big powers and the neighboring countries to recognize the legal Government of Bangladesh and take effective steps to stop immediately the awful genocide that has been carried on by the army of occupation from Pakistan.

To dub out the legally elected representatives of the majority of the people as secessionist is a crude joke and contradiction to truth which should be fool none.

The guiding principle of a new state will be first neutrality, second peace and third friendship to all and enmity to none.

May Allah help us.

Joy Bangla.<sup>51</sup>

By the time the Awami League returned to power in 1996, after a twenty-one year hiatus, the issue regarding who declared independence had become so controversial that a subsection was devoted to it in the new textbook, an issue not even worthy of mention in the 1973 textbook. On page 81, of the 1996 *Social Science* textbook for class VIII, Zia is credited with having made that broadcast, but not first or even second. Under a bold subtitle "Declaration of Independence", the textbook explains the controversy from the point of view of the Awami League,

At midnight, before arrest and just before dawn on 26th March, Bangabandhu declared the independence

of Bangladesh. He sent instructions to the party leader through wireless to the leaders of Dhaka and to the closest colleagues in Chittagong for broadcast of the declaration of independence. With this began our struggle for liberation. Bangabandhu directed in transmitting the message regarding the independence of Bangladesh to the Awami League leader Abdul Hannan in Chittagong on 26th March which he had broadcast to the Nation over Chittagong Radio station. On 27th March, Major Ziaur-Rahman, on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman communicated another message of independence to the people from Kalurghat temporary Betar Kendra.<sup>52</sup> By this time there was resistance all over the country against the Pakistani Junta.

This textbook does not deny that Zia was one of the actors who declared independence, but it puts the events into a perspective that makes his role not simply secondary, but tertiary. This is the Awami League perspective. Bangladeshis who are supportive of the BNP, emphasize Zia's decision to join the liberation forces—they tell a somewhat different, but highly contested version of the declaration of independence. They even proudly allude that Zia intuited he would be the president one day, and that is why he made the statement that he was the "head of independent Bangladesh".

M. Rashiduzzaman, in *Bangladesh: In Search of a New Historical Envisioning*<sup>53</sup>, discusses this contentious issue about the declaration of independence,

One common but divisive question: Who declared Bangladesh's independence? Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or Ziaur Rahman? Actually but sadly, Bangladesh is polarized over the independence declaration, which is not an academic disagreement pondering over a past event—it's a politically explosive question that determines the winners and losers of Bangladesh politics even today.

Rashiduzzaman concludes,

The Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP), the two largest parties are locked in a jockeying for power over who declared the independence in March 1971—Awami League chief Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or Ziaur Rahman, a military officer at that time.<sup>54</sup>

Zia, who was a junior officer in a Bengali regiment of the Pakistani Army, mutinied when he heard that the Pakistani Army was disarming and killing Bengali soldiers.<sup>55</sup> At the request of Awami League leaders, Zia made the announcement from a radio station near Chittagong, a port city in the eastern part of the country. In the version of this event revised during Zia's time, the school children of Bangladesh were told that he made the declaration on his own initiative, "as president of Bangladesh" not at the urging of the Awami League and not, as it was broadcast in March 27, 1971, in the "name of

Sheikh Mujib". This fairly significant alteration, that Zia actually declared independence *first*, not Mujib, caused considerable consternation among some quarters, but came to be believed among others. It is a highly contested, though completely contrived, moment in Bangladeshi history—worth fighting and dying for.<sup>56</sup>

In an article published in the fall of 2002, a year after the BNP had returned to power, A.H. Jaffor Ullah wrote,

As the nation of Bangladesh prepares to celebrate its 31st year of birth, we find the nation divided along a fault line. On one side of the fault line is the Bangalees who believe that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave the needed leadership for the cause of Bangalees since 1947. However, on the other side of this fault line are people who do not have much regards for Sheikh Mujib. To them, a military major who just deserted his battalion under questionable circumstances is the real hero because this junior army officer had read an announcement prepared by the local Awami League.<sup>57</sup>

Jaffor Ullah points out the irony in this bit of revisionist history,

The incident could have been a blip in the history of Bangladesh. But that is not necessarily the case. The junior officer happens to mastermind a coup in November 1975, which landed him the position of the Martial law administrator. He later 'regularized' his

position to become the strongman in the guise of a civilian dress.

The BNP would vigorously point out that Zia did not mastermind the coup, he was under house arrest when the sepoys mutinied. There was mayhem in the military ranks, and several officers had been murdered. The troops liberated Zia and carried him across the cantonment on their shoulders. The perspective promoted by the BNP credits Zia with saving Bangladesh.

In Dhaka in 1999, I interviewed a group of IXth class high school students, who expressed irritation that in grade five, while the BNP was in power, they were told "General Zia declared independence, but now in grade ten, [with Awami League in power] it's Sheikh Mujib!" The students asked indignantly, "Why should we be subjected to such manipulations?" They resented having to learn alternating poles of historical interpretation each time the regime changed.

The students with whom I spoke felt adamant that their "rights were being violated" when such liberties were taken with the telling of history in their textbooks. While I was in their class, they wrote out a letter on the blackboard that they planned to send to the minister of Education and the NCTB asking them to "get the facts straight and stop changing the story". Those young ladies have since graduated, but now, with Mrs. Zia back at the helm, her deceased husband is again the one who declared independence. So yet another batch of Bangladeshi students can unlearn a few facts in order to pass the test.

## Subtleties of Distortion

In the late seventies, the scars of the civil war and the memories of death and destruction were too near to be tampered with. Even though Sheikh Mujib became somewhat taboo after his murder<sup>58</sup>, the suffering of the people during the Liberation War was ingrained in the collective psyche. This ravaging is central to Bangladeshi identity. A clearly defined mission guided by memories of lost family members, instilled pride and patriotism in the Bangladeshi employees at the NCTB. These memories did not allow the government appointed committees to make too many radical changes to the textbooks regarding the pain and suffering of the Bengalis at the hands of the Pakistani Army. The Zia era textbooks were only a degree less descriptive about the pain and suffering of the war, but that toning down was resented by some Bangladeshis. The political events leading up to the liberation movement got lost in the BNP type narrative.

Historiography as constructed during the military period minimized the repeated use of the honorific "Bangabandhu". They subtracted a few phrases and added a line or two here and there. They put a greater focus on the military's role instead of the political activities leading to independence. But the story had to adequately retell the tale of suffering and sacrifice. The death and destruction of 1971 were recent and painful and could not be de-emphasized so easily. The additions that were made to the textbooks during the years of military rule became highly controversial, particularly the newly minted fact that

General Zia was now given credit for declaring independence.

The long time employee of the NCTB who answered many questions about changes made in the textbooks during the military period, explained the situation at the NCTB,

The history of Bangladesh, particularly the events leading to the liberation movement and emergence of Bangladesh, was not treated objectively and factually in the textbooks during 21 years covering post Mujib and pre-Hasina period when the country was ruled by either Martial Law or Cantonment-based democratic governments. Hence the young generation of today, born or grown up during this period, were kept unaware and misinformed of the opposition of Pakistan rulers, struggle for autonomy to independence, armed resistance or the people, contribution of the architect of the nation, calculated carnage of the collaborators and the role played by the neighboring countries, Arab world, and big powers during our liberation movement.

This gentleman, who had just retired from two decades of service at the NCTB continued his description of the situation, how the controversy regarding who declared independence got into the textbooks. He explained,

Just one example may suffice to prove how history was distorted and wrongly presented. The revised edition (1977) of textbooks on Secondary History (for

grades 9 & 10) published by the BSTB [Bangladesh School Textbook Board, that was later changed to NCTB] describes the Declaration of Independence in this way: 'on 27th of March Major Ziaur Rahman of 8th East Bengal Regiment (later President of Bangladesh) declared the independence of Bangladesh from Chittagong Radio.' (page 377). The fact is presented in so distorted and motivated way that the author didn't or wasn't allowed to mention that Major Zia made his announcement, even in his own recorded words, 'on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, our great national leader.' Bangladesh observes her Independence Day on 26th March and victory day on 16th December every year. But how funny and sarcastic it is to say that declaration of independence was made on 27th March? And that declaration by an obscure and hitherto unknown Major and not by the guiding figure and undisputed political personality of that time. Students were made to study this sort of inaccurate history which in reality forms the most glorious part of their national history.

He added, that a new textbook, from 1984, somewhat corrected the above story,

As a matter of fact, prior to his arrest by the Pakistani horde in the early hour of 26th March, Bangabandhu sent the formal message of independence to the Awami League leader M.A. Hannan of Chittagong over wireless which was broadcast from Chittagong Radio

on the day of 26th March. Major Zia made the announcement the following day and that exclusively on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After the formulation of Mujibnagar government, Zia was made one of the eleven Sector Commanders who fought the liberation war during 9 months of occupation. The above information remained until a new textbook on the subject was introduced in 1984. This book contained more details on the background and other events relating to the liberation movement.<sup>59</sup> The declaration of independence remained almost the same, but with the new insertion of 'on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman'.

Another gentleman I met spoke about how textbooks were altered during military rule, and how the NCTB resisted these alterations. He told me this story with a great deal of pleasure,

In the mid eighties General Ershad looked at some of the history textbooks and wondered why he was not included in them as the leader of Bangladesh. He issued a directive that the NCTB should insert him into the history textbooks. At the meeting of the curriculum planners there was a lot of discussion. People wanted to know how we could include him and what good could be said about him? Finally we decided to add a sentence in a Civics textbook about how Ershad instituted the Upazillas<sup>60</sup>, thereby inserting

his name but with no other mention. A small photo was included to placate his ego.

He added with a touch of pride that, "there is a certain resistance mentality here in Bangladesh which precludes the overhaul of textbooks by official decree".

He remembered fondly that at a time when, "Ershad thought of himself as supreme leader of the country, the NCTB awarded him only a small photograph and a short sentence." This entry about Ershad was placed in the civics section of the book for Class V—it could not be included in history textbooks, because as mentioned, the official version of Bangladeshi history ended on January 10, 1972. No post-independence history can be written without mentioning the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, much less the series of highly controversial military coups, precluding any additions to the telling of the story of post-independence Bangladesh.

The NCTB, to comply, but with guarded resistance, included Ershad in the civics textbook only in reference to his creation of the upazilla, or rural electoral districts. By the mid-eighties, additions were argued at length but they gradually made their way into the textbooks. This scholar told me that the staff at NCTB rather ridiculed Ershad, "We couldn't find anything good he had done for the country besides creating the Upazillas." But they still were compelled to include his photo—to placate him.

Another informed former NCTB employee described the situation in which Ershad's photo was inserted into the Civics textbook,

Social Studies book of class 5 was modified and rewritten incorporating the then administrative developmental works including decentralization of judiciary and establishment of Sub-District administration and inserting a picture of Ershad.

Several people at the NCTB told me that this executive decree was laboriously discussed before Ershad's singular contribution was included. Regardless of this hesitation, as relations with Pakistan improved, due to the 'friendship of the military dictators and their parallel efforts to Islamize the two nations, there was a distinct dilution of the dramatic discourse that had fired up the first history textbooks. The early Bangladeshi textbooks had graphically implicated Pakistan not only for exploitation and oppression, but also genocide on a scale comparable only to the Nazi holocaust—the later military influenced books took the fire out of the narrative.

Bangladeshi intellectuals who had been part of the scene since the birth of the country, and who were also involved with committees to write and edit textbooks, assured me there was indeed something of a resistance mentality. Coercive governmental decrees were not blindly followed by all bureaucrats, scholars and government employees. I asked my friend and informant, who had worked in the textbook office for decades, how he dealt with changes that were mandated with which he did not agree. When the political climate changed, how did members of the textbook board modify the textbooks to reflect what autocratic regimes wished, if the writers and reviewers disagreed?

What was the process of political mandates versus scholarship, and the interplay between these two forces, which at times may have been adversarial? He answered, overturning the claim of a "resistance mentality" that I had heard from several others,

Whenever major works of development, revision, and editing of curriculum, syllabus, and textbooks take place, different subject committees are formed with university, college, and classroom teachers, subject experts, renowned educationists, teacher trainers, curriculum specialists and pedagogists. Conventionally, sets of people are chosen from those who are, though experienced, moderate in nature and easily subscribe to views of the authorities. A negligible number of experts of opposite views or resistance mentality are included in the committee. Sometimes they reacted to coercive governmental decrees and declined to work in the committee. Even though they worked they are out numbered and their views are generally set aside. The clash between political mandates and scholastic pursuits is really unfortunate and undesirable. Nevertheless, it happens. Curriculum researchers and specialists at NCTB may not personally agree with some of the mandates of the government. But they have hardly any freedom to act independently without yielding to or differing from government views and standpoint.

There may be a certain resistance mentality in Bangladesh which perhaps dissuades the forces of official coercion and

the overhaul of textbooks by government decree. However, the textbooks written under Zia, that effectively excluded Mujib and made an effort to obscure the genocide, served as the model for the next 21 years. The textbooks published under Ershad, in 1984, followed this model, adding more about the liberation war and the prowess of the Bangladesh Army, but still continued to at least partially ignore Mujib.

Some of the most glaring alterations made by Zia, by fiat, were eventually corrected *de facto* by accretion and small additions made in each revision. In 1986, a professor at Dhaka University was asked to serve on a committee to edit and review the history textbooks. On one page he "added the word 'Bangabandhu' in front of the name of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman". His colleagues challenged him, wondering if that "was a good idea given the political climate". The professor said, "Leave it. It should be there to adequately represent history." The word was inserted. The 1984 edition did not have Bangabandhu in front of Mujib's name anywhere in the book. Because of this daring professor, the 1987 version had "Bangabandhu" written once. But, as the professor told me, its inclusion was controversial, if not dangerous.<sup>61</sup>

The manner in which the textbooks were gradually rewritten in Bangladesh is very different than the method of the BJP in India, where changes in the orientation of historiography have been implemented with media fanfare and broad consultation—a very public debate. In the very different political atmosphere of BNP/Islamist government controlled Bangladesh, changes were clandestinely implemented, with little public review.

A much more open approach was adopted with the change in the political guard in 1996. The Awami League's efforts to "correct the history textbooks" were publicly announced and the process was accomplished within six months by an advisory board of scholars. Their goal to re-Bangabandhuise the books was no secret. On the other hand, in 2001 immediately after the BNP won the elections, the books were quickly put through a clandestine editing process without public discussion. The new textbooks simply appeared a few weeks after the election, almost completely de-Bangabandhuised.

When Sheikh Mujib was assassinated by a military coup, a feeling of fear and sorrow pervaded much of the nation. I also was told there were "people dancing in the streets" to celebrate Mujib's death. Many pro-BNP Bangladeshis told me that Mujib may have been a great leader during the drive towards independence, but as the head of the independent country, he was "inept, corrupt and disorganized". I asked several people if he and his family had to die for his inability to successfully govern a nation that had been raped and ravished and where the enemies and collaborators, whom he had pardoned had free reign? There were people I spoke to in Dhaka who seemed to think that disorganization was a capital offence.

Though some Bangladeshis may have danced in the streets, most people told me that they drew their curtains and prayed that they would not be subsumed back into Pakistan. There was a lot of fear and foreboding. From what I could gather, far more people wept than danced. A teacher at a teacher training college near Sheikh Mujib's

house in Dhanmondi, told me that she was in a bicycle rickshaw going to work a few days after his murder. A truck of army men passed by and yelled at her "cover your head because the military has taken over and we are going to establish an Islamic republic". In both Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Shari'at and the military are constant bedfellows in a strange brew of whisky drinking soldiers with visions of jihad.

In the textbook revised in 1977 under the regime of General Zia-ur Rehman, most references to Sheikh Mujib and "Bengalee Nationalism" were downplayed as he ushered in the Islamisation of Bangladesh. A long-term employee at the NCTB concurred with this observation, when I asked him if this was the case.

Yes, there is truth in the information you gathered from different quarters regarding the exclusion of some terms and words such as 'Bangabandhu', 'Joy Bangla', 'Pakistan occupation Army', 'Razakar', etc., from the textbooks and government controlled media. These terms were deliberately expunged so as to deprive the new generation knowing about the true story about our heroic liberation struggle.

After the assassination of Zia, and during the Ershad era, more changes were forced on the textbooks published by the NCTB. The story of the creation of the nation was gradually altered to focus more on the contributions to the war efforts of the East Bengali military men and less on the political role of Sheikh Mujib and the government in exile

in West Bengal. The Bangladesh military was shown to be organized and in control, whereas they were actually fighting a guerrilla war, financed<sup>62</sup> and armed by India. In the 1984 era textbook, the focus is almost entirely on the actions of the military with most of the story devoted to the efforts of the Bengali regiment leaders, and particularly the air force, which was only virtually operational and that too for only the last few days of the fighting—but it is glamorous. The political aspects were de-emphasized. Sheikh Mujib was barely mentioned.

The narrative focused on the military instead of diplomacy, for example, from chapter twenty in the 1987 revision of the afore-mentioned 1984 text, the events are described in military terms,

As early as April, General Osmani planned for expansion and reconstruction of the regular force which included the formation of the guerrilla force and naval command. He formed them in the month of May and arranged for their training and supply for their arms.<sup>63</sup> At the same time he reconstructed the air force and land force. In late June he started sending the guerrilla forces inside the country to attack the aggressor army. The regular army and the *ganobahini* (guerrilla) participated in the war in various sectors as per planning. From the start of the War of Liberation till the start of the Indo-Pak war on 3rd December, 1971 this Mukti Bahini showed endless courage and unprecedented patriotism in conducting the war.<sup>64</sup> [...]

The commander-in-Chief of the armed forces

divided the battlefield into eleven sectors. The responsibility of each sector was rested with one sector commander.

No textbook in Bangladesh has ever left out General Osmani, the famous "Papa Tiger" of the Bengal regiment, who led the liberation war. He is, however, not popular with either the Awami League or the BNP. In 1971, he was a seasoned officer and a gentleman and made part of Mujib's government. During each of the many coups and counter coups that followed Mujib's assassination, General Osmani called for order, sometimes according to Mascarenhas, hitchhiking across Dhaka to prevent a civil war between rival factions within the military.

Osmani's commitment to Bangladesh, his fame and bravery during the liberation war is universally acknowledged. But it was his balanced personality while dealing with renegade military men who grabbed power, one after another that led General Osmani to be included in each new administrative set up, no matter how temporary. He was the chief of staff or advisor to each military junta that took control after Mujib's murder.

He was not involved with any of these coups or coup attempts, according to research by Anthony Mascarenhas.<sup>65</sup> But his inclusion in each new regime is indicative of his respect and popularity. He was never seen as power hungry, and he did not support the coup leaders for personal glory. His advice was aimed at preserving Bangladesh and preventing bloodshed. At times he may have compromised

himself in dealing with certain individuals, but he was sincere in his efforts to keep things under control.

Somehow, due to his neutrality, he has not been adopted as the poster child of any of the political parties. The Awami League was accused of trying to diminish the role of General Osmani. But the BNP hasn't included him in the many readers they have produced about their chosen heroes, either. He is not an unsung hero, he is remembered and buildings are named after him. Posthumously, his representation in history textbooks has become an issue as the BNP government justifies their recent rewriting of history.

At a celebration held on Osmani's 19th death anniversary in February 2003, an article about that event quoted a participant. He stated that the "present [BNP] government has taken a project to write the 'true history of the Liberation War'". The speaker averred that once that occurred, "Gen. Osmani's contribution would obviously get its rightful place in the history of Bangladesh". Osmani is, in fact, one of the few heroes of the liberation war who has received his due respect—not for his battle to save the country during the numerous military coups after August 1975, but only for his efforts to create it in 1971<sup>66</sup>. As leader of the Mukhijuddho army, General Osmani figures prominently in the military era books.

Alluding to accusations that the Awami League had written Osmani out of the story, which a quick look at the Awami League textbooks disproves, the speaker at the February 2003 seminar concluded that with the BNP in control, "there was no scope of distorting history". Since

their reelection in October 2001, the BNP has poured over the textbooks to de-Bangabandhuise them. The BNP holds that in 1996 the Awami League distorted history by emphasizing Sheikh Mujib over all others. The BNP's first goal was to tone down the Awami League textbooks, in which eulogistic essays and paragraphs about "Bangabandhu" dominated.

For example, a Bengali literature reader for Class VIII, *Shahitya Konika*, first published in November 1996 included "a six-page essay on Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman". In that Awami League era text, "there were no other entries on other important political figures of the time". Though this book is "pure literature", there were changes made "bearing important political implications". In order to correct what the BNP saw as Awami League distortions, the essay on Mujib was shortened and three new entries were added to the 2001 edition of this reader.<sup>67</sup> By retaining an abbreviated version of the Mujib essay, while at the same time including essays on two very famous historical figures associated with the creation of East Pakistan, the BNP could, without much controversy, also add an essay about General Zia. In doing so, they can claim, which they do, that they are correcting the [alleged] distortions implemented by the Awami League in 1996, without erasing "Bangabandhu" completely as had been done during the military years.

The BNP textbook does not scrap the essay. Rather, while retaining the essay, though a little shorter, it incorporated four more entries on A.K. Fazlul Huq, Suhrawardhi, Bhasani and Ziaur Rahman.<sup>68</sup>

In textbooks during the Zia's and Ershad's periods, Sheikh Mujib hardly figures in the story of the creation of the nation. In the textbook written in 1984 and revised in 1987, *The History of Bangladesh for Class Nine and Ten*, in chapter twenty, the "War of Liberation",<sup>69</sup> Mujib is only mentioned twice.

Besides a short paragraph about the government in exile, the focus is on the heroic exploits of the Bangladeshi military regiments. One place in this 1987 textbook, the word Bangabandhu appears before the name Sheikh Mujib. As mentioned, a professor at Dhaka University had daringly inserted the word Bangabandhu, where it had not appeared in the 1984 edition.

In 1998, my informant at the NCTB told me that,

Only a few months before the taking over power by the present [AL] government, some NCTB officers took the risk of partially correcting the declaration of independence in the Social Studies books of class V. Possibly the change of government saved them from authorities' wrath and service hazards.

During the time I was in Bangladesh, newspapers and magazines often carried articles about historiography and the meaning of the War of Liberation. It was a passionate obsession.<sup>70</sup> *Star Magazine* had a cover story on December 18, 1998, "The Missing History of the Muktiyuddho". Almost on a daily basis there was an article or an editorial that discussed the loss of or distortion of history.

In the *Daily Star*, on December 16, 1998, among the multiple pages devoted to the "Victory Day Special" edition,

was an article on page six by Mir A. Zaman, "Future! Whose Future?". Zaman wrote that the "victory day" he remembers best is "December 4, 1990", when Ershad's government fell. The whole of Dhaka was celebrating in the streets. The author quotes a shop keeper who had been in Dhaka in December 1971 and compared the jubilation of both events. Zaman was too young to remember December 1971, but the relief and joy he felt in 1990 was comparable, another era of autocracy was over.

Zaman discusses the politicization of the Liberation War rhetoric,

When the Pakistani occupation forces surrendered, some people became freedom-fighters overnight and unscrupulously took advantage of the prevailing disorder in the war-torn country. Later on, the politicians resorted to somewhat a similar strategy. In their frenzied attempt to politicize the War of Liberation, they rewrote history. With each government came addition or omission. History was distorted for the convenience of the people in power. Even now, politicians engage in intense debate on who led the country to independence, who declared the War, so on and so forth.

Echoing what the high school girls had told me, Zaman wrote,

[P]olitical maneuverings have left [the] country's youth robbed of their rights to know the past in its entirety, no addition, no omission, no distortion, no fabrication:

their right to the truth, the whole truth. Those who have been born in and after 1971, have been kept in the dark. They have seen politicians accusing each other of distorting history. They know not whether what they have read in the books is the truth or just a distorted version of truth. They are not sure who is telling the truth or who is lying. Confusion leads to frustration and eventually to impregnable indifference.

He quotes a "21-year-old [who] questioned... in a dismissive tone, 'What spirit [of the Victory Day] do they talk about? Where do we get it from? History books? Who wrote them? Politicians or historians?'" Zaman concluded,

These questions unfortunately, go unanswered and the young generation, expected to lead the nation towards a better tomorrow, looks back and finds that there was no past to take a foot into for a foot into the future.

Bangladesh is a vibrant colourful country with brilliant intellectuals. It has a rich culture and a past that is full of inspirations, heroes, and lessons, but its contemporary history is so highly contested that its narration is frozen in time.<sup>71</sup>

### **From a Vision of Humanism to the Agenda of Islamism**

After General Zia-ur Rahman's assassination in 1981, Bangladesh was subjected to a decade of military rule under General Ershad. Though during this time, more changes were made to the textbooks.<sup>72</sup> The most dramatic changes

made by the two military rulers were the changes in the Constitution of Bangladesh. These religiously oriented alterations in the Constitution are there to stay. Once Islam has been declared the law of the land, even undemocratically, by military fiat, it can never be repealed, on threat of apostasy.

Under the leadership of the Awami League, the 1972 Constitution declared that the People's Republic of Bangladesh was a secular socialist democratic nation. The Constitution stated that "The Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed."<sup>73</sup> Less than a decade later, the military rulers had this line inserted, the "Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all actions." Bangladeshi human rights advocate, Shahriar Kabir, a noted writer and film maker explained that, "These two parts [of the Constitution] are contradictory."

The military rulers added to the Preamble, a pledge to uphold "the high ideals of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah" that is in contradiction to the secular nature of the original Constitution. This inserted statement in the Bangladeshi Constitution, mimics the Preamble to the Pakistani Constitution or the Objectives Resolution, that was added at the insistence of religious elements in Pakistan, especially the Jamaat-i-Islami who, during the first years of nationhood wanted to influence the set up of the government and give it a distinctly Islamic flavor, as they still do today. The Objectives Resolution was highly controversial at that time, because it effectively discriminated against the Hindus in United Pakistan, who

were barely a few percent in the western wing, but in 1948 comprised about twenty-five per cent of the population of East Pakistan.

It was therefore ominous for minorities, and in opposition to the original intentions of Sheikh Mujib, and the brave freedom fighters who won independence, not to mention the scholars and lawyers who wrote the original Constitution, when the military dictators of Bangladesh declared the "state religion of the Republic is Islam".<sup>74</sup> This effectively nullified articles in the Constitution such as, the "state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth." Shahriar Kabir explained,

Bangladesh had emerged as a secular state on the grave of Pakistani religious ideals [but] pro-Pakistanis captured power after the 1975 assassination of Bangladesh's founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman [and inserted] discriminatory clause(s) between Muslim and non-Muslim [that were not included] in the original constitution of Bangladesh.

Kabir described the assault by military rulers on the secular constitution of Bangladesh,

After the assassination of Bangabandhu, two military rulers, General Ziaur Rahman and General H.M. Ershad removed the roots of the country's secular, non-communal and humane ideals. They changed the

constitution to serve a vested quarter and thus eliminated the clause of equal rights for the Hindus, Christians and Buddhists along with indigenous ethnic communities like Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Maug, Hajong, etc. In the original constitution, which was written in 1972, Article 12 in Part II enshrined 'secularism and freedom of Religion' in the section called Fundamental Principle of State Policy. General Ziaur Rahman's military government totally erased this part of the constitution and that was how the religious and ethnic minority groups became second-class citizens to suffer state discrimination.<sup>75</sup>

According to Dr. Amena Mohsin, in *The Journal of Social Studies*<sup>76</sup>,

though General Ershad was looked [upon] as usurper, and his regime was termed as undemocratic and autocratic by both Khaleda Zia led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Shiekh Hasina led Awami League, yet none of these parties even after assuming power [...] would be able to retrench the Islamisation measures taken by Ershad".<sup>77</sup>

Saleem Samad explains, quoting Dr. Amena Mohsin, "The Constitution of Bangladesh, despite Awami League [...] remains an Islamic one". Samad surmises, "It is then logical ... to assume that democracy is a prerogative of the dominant majority only".

In his informative article, *State of Minorities in Bangladesh*, Saleem Samad presents a side of Bangladeshi history that has received very little attention. The Awami League, who early on impressed the world with their secular credentials, ignores this bit of history. The BNP ignores it because their founder began the Islamisation process in 1975, and especially now that they are aligned with the Jamaat-i-Islami since 2001, they want to take credit for Islamising the nation.

Samad explains, Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman, "revived [the] Islamic Academy" that he had "banned in 1972", and "upgraded [it to a] Foundation ...in March 1975". During the last years of his tenure, Mujib "increasingly attended Islamic gatherings". Samad writes that Mujib sought and received "recognition of OIC membership [Organization of Islamic Countries] ... [in] February 1974". Samad cites Mujib's "sudden decision to participate at [the] OIC conference in Lahore, Pakistan [in] 1974, [and establish] diplomatic ties with Pakistan". Mujib's "unconditional pardon of the occupational forces of Pakistan involved in war crimes on innocent people, especially women and their subsequent safe repatriation", were according to Samad, "interpreted by political critics that Mujib stood at a confused crossroads."

"Two social scientists and political analysts" cited in Samad's article, "Dr. Talukder Maniruzzaman and Dr. Syed Anwar Husain" have expressed similar views that explain how "Mujib had significantly shifted from [a] secular attitude towards [the] sentiment of the majority". Samad quotes, Dr. Maniruzzaman,

Towards the end of his rule, Mujib made frequent references to Islam in his speeches and public utterances by using terms and idioms which were peculiar mainly to the Islam-oriented Bangladeshi—like Allah (the Almighty God), Insha Allah (God willing), Bismillah (in the name of God), Tawaba (Penitence) and Imam (religious leader). As days passed on Shiekh Mujib even dropped his symbolic valedictory expression Joy Bangla (Glory to Bengal) and ended his speeches with Khuda Hafez (May God protect you), the traditional Indo-Islamic phrase for bidding farewell. In his later day speeches, he also highlighted his efforts to establish cordial relations with the Muslim countries in the Middle East.<sup>78</sup>

The situation in Bangladesh reflected the same strange dichotomy between secular socialism and Islamisation that was happening simultaneously in West Pakistan. In the east, Mujib "was turning towards a pseudo-religious stewardship", but as Samad points out, his "religious ebullience" was mostly "rhetoric". Historically, and in popular memory, Mujib is credited with establishing the first truly secular nation that had a Muslim majority. The Islamists' factions deride Mujib for not making Islam the supreme law of the land that was demographically one of the largest Muslim majority nations in the world. "After Bangladesh's birth, the first few years the new nation was not recognized as a separate sovereign entity by many of the Arab nations, notably Saudi Arabia which insisted that Bangladesh should adopt an Islamic constitution first."<sup>79</sup>

The Pakistanis and their Bengali collaborators before and during the liberation struggle, placed Mujib in the category of apostate—he was driving the Bengali Muslims away from Allah and towards an effete Hinduised Bengalee cultural nationalism.

After the break up of the nation, the same phenomenon was happening in the western wing. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was projected as a socialist, but in reality, though he “nationalized” numerous banks, schools, factories, sugar mills, and other industries and institutions, he turned them over to his sycophants or “*chamchas*” who drove them into bankruptcy due to corruption. Many of his critics have claimed that he had no inclination towards socialism, but during the election campaign before the civil war, he found that the followers of his party, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), were advocating a socialist view to challenge the power of the zamindars and waderas<sup>80</sup>. A joke in Pakistan has it that when Bhutto realized the direction of the electorate, he adopted socialism as one of his mandates. It is said that when he saw he was being left behind ideologically, he “put on a red shirt and ran to the front of the crowd”.

Bhutto is highly criticized by the Islamists who accuse him of being overly secular. Yet, it was during Z.A. Bhutto's tenure that they were declared “non-Muslims”. Hindus and Christians were made to vote in separate electorates which significantly diminished their electoral choices and influence. It is Bhutto who first institutionalized the concept of the “Ideology of Pakistan”, though his successor and the man who had him hung on the gallows, General Zia-ul

Haq is credited with propagating this ideology "Nazariya Pakistan", a narrow, Islamized perspective of nationalism.<sup>81</sup> Textbooks in Pakistan, that eulogize General Zia-ul Haq for his successful agenda to Islamize the country, call Z.A. Bhutto's efforts, "too little, too late".<sup>82</sup>

Even if they tried to placate the fundamentalist factions, both Mujib and Bhutto are remembered as secular quasi-socialists. Depending on how it is interpreted, they either tried to bring their nations into the mainstream of world civilization, or, from the point of view of a Mullah, they were dangerously anti-Islamic. Either way, both versions of both stories are incomplete and lopsided.

Meanwhile, in Bangladesh,

The process of using Islam for leadership legitimization purposes gathered momentum during the military regimes of General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and General H.M. Ershad (1982-1990). Zia doctored the Constitution, "scraped secularism from the four state principles [and inserted] Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim (in the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful)". The principle of secularism was overturned and "replaced by the words, 'Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all action' ".<sup>83</sup>

Ziaur Rahman tried to Islamize education.<sup>84</sup> He had Islamiyat "introduced as compulsory from classes one to eight with option for minority students to take similar religious courses of their own".<sup>85</sup> My friend from the NCTB

described Ershad's efforts to Islamise the curriculum, in the early eighties,

[Ershad's] attempts for introduction of Arabic along with Bangla and English at the primary level ... failed in the vehement opposition of the students, educationists, and intellectuals.

He then explained that Ershad continued to put pressure on the NCTB to Islamise the curriculum, as he reached towards the religious community to support his failing regime.<sup>86</sup>

During General Ershad's regime two notable changes took place in curriculum and textbooks. Religious education was made compulsory at the secondary level through a government notification dated 12.12.1989. Before this notification, Religious Education was compulsory up to Grade 8 and elective subject in grades 9 & 10.

He pointed out that, "These changes minimized the scope for studying science subjects."

Saleem Samad sums up the impact of Ershad's Islamisation efforts,

Between 1982 and 1990, Ershad made systematic efforts to continue the policy of Zia, rehabilitating anti-liberation elements and the parallel Islamisation culminating in the disputable Eighth amendment to

the Constitution declaring 'Islam' as a state religion. Earlier short-lived government of Mustaque Ahmed (August 1975 - November 1975) brought to power at a behest of young military officers, declared Peoples Republic of Bangladesh as 'Islamic Republic of Bangladesh' over the state radio, which, however, fetched recognition of Saudi Arabia, Libya and China.

Now all school children in Bangladesh must take a course on religion. During this class period, Hindu children go to one classroom and Christian children to another room, while the majority of the students, who are Muslims, remain in their classroom for their lessons on Islamiyat. Several Hindu students with whom I spoke at a small school in Mymensingh complained that this process set them apart even more from their peers. They said that they get religious instruction at home, from parents or priests, and didn't like being segregated at school on the basis of their religion. Some of them opted to sit in on the Islamiyat classes in an effort to fit it.

After several years of social unrest and street protests, General Ershad "stepped down". When democracy was finally restored in 1991, the BNP was elected by a slim margin in a highly contested election that was not free from fraud and violence—an unfortunate phenomenon that often accompanies a nation's return to democracy after decades of dictatorship. During the subsequent six years of BNP rule, there was no need for them to change the tone or the content of the existing textbooks. They contained the version of the independence war representing Zia as the

one who declared the independence of Bangladesh. The six years of BNP governance were marked by months of *hartals*<sup>87</sup> and violent street demonstrations orchestrated by Sheikh Hasina's Awami League.

The following six years, 1996-2001, during the Awami League tenure, were also marked by endless violent and destructive *hartals*, enforced by the BNP. Since October 2001, when the BNP again took control of the government, the violence has not abated. With the return of democracy and the political battle between the Awami League and the BNP, historiography in Bangladesh has been pulled one way, then the other. Civil society as well has been stretched to its limits by violence and corruption. Social Studies textbooks, seen as a malleable tool for indoctrination, are particularly subject to political pressures. This is particularly true in a country such as Bangladesh where democratic institutions are fragile and bureaucrats and scholars easily intimidated or bought.

## The Unstable Story of the Nation

During the first six years of the return of democracy in Bangladesh, between 1991–1996, while the BNP ruled by semi-popular mandate, Mrs. Zia seems to have had little concern about the textbooks, and no new versions of history were written. The textbooks that had been in use during the previous military period reflected the legacy of the imperatives of her late husband's political persuasion. When the Awami League returned to power in 1996, after a hiatus of twenty-one years, as mentioned, changing the textbooks was one of Sheikh Hasina's top priorities.

Winning only slightly more votes than the BNP in the second post-military-rule election, which was also highly contested and not free from fraud and violence, the political balance shifted by just a few percentage points, but it pushed the historiographical pendulum into full swing. Omissions and additions, changes that had encroached upon the narrative were overturned. Words such as "Bangabandhu" were reinserted with vigour. The Awami Leaguers were proudly proclaiming their perspectives of history that had

been de-emphasized. They enthusiastically resituated slogans such as "Joy Bangla" that had been gradually eaten away, by a decade and a half of top down military governance. The grand sweep of millennial history was not of great concern, but the politically motivated changes in the retelling of modern history and the story of the birth of the nation had to be corrected, and in the views of the Awami League, returned to the facts. Between 1996–2001, during the six years of Awami League governance, many buildings and bridges were named or renamed Bangabandhu, a veritable Bangabandhuisation of Bangladesh.

The ancient and medieval periods, though these eras had been central to the historiographic record created by Bangladeshi historians just after independence, were not of political interest to Zia and Ershad. The manner in which the Aryans, the Buddhists, the Mughals were represented remained relatively unchanged during the years of military rule. Zia and Ershad only tampered with the details about the civil war, its heroes and allies. But most significantly, they altered the secular nature of the nation, and set it on a course in the opposite direction than its original orientation—a course toward jihadi Islam that would ultimately unravel the fabric of tolerance and pluralism upon which Bangladesh was originally founded.

### Hamood-ur-Rehman, War Crimes, and Long Delayed Justice

In 1996, several things were added to the textbooks, particularly a descriptive paragraph about the negative role

played by the Jamaat-i-Islami during the liberation war, on page eighty-two of *Social Science for class Eight*,

During the Liberation War Jamate Islam<sup>88</sup>, a group of people allied with Muslim League vehemently opposed the liberation war and helped the Pakistani forces in different ways. The collaborators of Pakistani Army formed many battalions of killers in the style of Rajakar, Al-Badar, Al-Shams with the object of killing the intellectuals in a pre-planned way. They sorted out and kidnapped the reputed teachers, doctors, artists and journalists including the intelligentsia and murdered them brutally.

In contrast, in the textbooks written for Class IX and X during Ershad's military rule, published in 1984 and revised in 1987, the collaborative role of the Jamaat-i-Islami is not specified and the language is less dramatic,

During this time the *local agents of the Pak military forces Al Shams and Al Badar forces*, in the dark of curfew, mercilessly killed teachers, doctors, journalists and many other intellectuals of Bangladesh.<sup>89</sup> (emphasis added)

The murder of the intellectuals on December 14 was a last desperate, and horribly violent action by the *razakars* and *al-badars*, groups of armed Bengali Islamic fundamentalists who supported the Pakistani crackdown on Dhaka. They worked to obstruct the secession of East Pakistan, but

when it was clear that the Indian Army was quickly cutting a swath through East Pakistan towards Dhaka in mid December, the *razakars* opted to murder all the leading intellectuals—a cruel bid to cut off the head of the country that they could not prevent, but that they had opposed. Golam Azam, the leader of the Jaamat-i-Islami in erstwhile East Pakistan, was vocal and public about his opposition to the independence movement. He was a close confidant of General Tikka Khan, known as the “Butcher of Bengal<sup>90</sup>”.

Azam is known to have provided lists of names and addresses of pro-Bengalee intellectuals to the infamous Pakistani general, Rao Farman Ali. Both Golam Azam and Rao Farman Ali are blamed for orchestrating the gruesome murders on December 14, when professors and other professionals were kidnapped from their homes in the dark of night and hacked to death, their bodies thrown in a ravine. In the Muktiyuddha Jadughar (The Liberation War Museum), established in Dhaka during the mid-nineties, as an institute dedicated to preserving the memory of the War of Liberation, there are 1971 era photographs of Golam Azam having tea with Tikka Khan.

Golam Azam, along with many of his *razakar* cronies, fled to Pakistan after Bangladesh gained independence. He later returned in the mid-nineties, after obtaining special, very controversial permission from the Khaleda Zia government—travelling to Bangladesh on a Pakistani passport to look after his ailing mother. A mock trial was held for Azam by many intellectuals, who brought out his war crimes and urged the BNP government to arrest Golam and try him for treason. Instead, the professors were arrested

by the BNP for holding the mock trial. They even tried to charge Professor Anisuzzaman, one of Bangladesh's most respected senior intellectuals. The issue of putting the "war criminals" on trial has torn apart Bangladeshi society since 1972 when Sheikh Mujib pardoned all the collaborators in an attempt to unite factions in the new country.

In the fall of 1998, I spoke to a group of high school boys at the Lab School in Dhaka. I asked them what one thing would be the best for their country? "Besides economic and educational development," I queried them, "what single national issue is the most important from your point of view?" Several boys answered, almost in unison, "There should be a war crimes trial."

I was surprised that my question elicited such an immediate almost choral response. I asked, "Why a trial?" Their answers were well thought-out and based on precedent. One teenager told me: "There should be an official international inquiry, like they did in Rwanda and Bosnia." Another added, "We should have a Nuremberg style trial." Several boys mentioned that Nazis were still being hunted and that "one old Nazi had recently been arrested in the USA." "Why," they asked, "shouldn't the Bangladeshis also have justice for crimes against humanity?"

Indeed during 1998, after the repeal of the Indemnity Ordinance that had protected the assassins, there was a sensational trial for the murderers of Sheikh Mujib and his family and others who had been slain on that tragic night in 1975, as well as the four leaders who were brutally murdered in a Dhaka jail cell a few months later. The

newspapers were full of the proceedings of the trial. One suspect was picked up in Thailand. Others were absconding in foreign countries, including the USA, and extradition proceedings were underway. All fifteen accused were found guilty, and sentenced to death. During the days of the trial, the BNP held numerous *hartals* in protest.<sup>91</sup>

In August 2000, a copy of the long concealed Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission report was published. This was a famous study, commissioned by Z.A. Bhutto, to investigate the causes of the loss of the eastern wing of the country. Since the report implicated both the Pakistani military and the politicians for corruption and incompetence, it was shelved as quickly as it was released and all known copies said to have been destroyed. In August 2000, a copy of the long lost Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission report was leaked to *The Times of India* that published lengthy sections implicating the Pakistanis for genocide, much less strategic ineptitude. The release of this report fuelled the drive to bring justice to Bangladeshis for war atrocities.

General Musharraf commented on the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission report while at the UN Millennial Conference in New York, in September 2000. He said, "Let's forget the bitterness of the past and move forward. [...] Something happened 30 years ago. Why do we want to live in history? As a Pakistani, I would like to forget 1971." Many Bangladeshis, whose fathers, brothers, and uncles, whose doctors, scientists, professors, and other noncombatants, were murdered during the Pakistani occupation, feel differently about the memory of 1971. At

least half the population of Bangladesh never wants to forget 1971. Another half wants to forget just the parts that include Bangabandhu.

Since October 2001, scholars, such as the respected Professor Muntassir Mamoon, who advocated trials for the murders and collaborators, were themselves arrested shortly after the BNP returned to power. One columnist commented on this situation,

Prof. Muntassir Mamun, a columnist and historian, [was] among several prominent government critics arrested on December 8 [2001] in the capital, Dhaka. He had been outspoken of war crimes committed by pro-Islamist elements presently with the coalition government led by Begum Khaleda Zia. He was held under sedition laws of trying to destabilise the government.<sup>92</sup>

Three weeks after September 11, 2001, with a similarly slim margin as in 1991, the BNP again won the election, this time in a coalition with the Jamaat-i-Islam and several other Islamist parties.<sup>93</sup> They immediately began to de-Bangabandhuise the textbooks, removing a whole paragraph about the Mujib Bahini, which had been controversial when it was inserted, and other Awami League rewrites added during Sheikh Hasina's six years at the helm.

As mentioned earlier, one reference added by the Awami League to the eighth grade Civics textbook, that was immediately removed by the BNP, was the discussion of the Indemnity Ordinance. That notorious Indemnity

Ordinance was enacted by the military government to preempt possible charges against Mujib's assassins. Those assassins were, during the following decades, sent as diplomats to prized destinations in the West. Now many of their supporters have been made ministers.

In 1996, overturning the Indemnity Ordinance was one of the first objectives in the order of priorities when the Awami League returned to power. At that time, the BNP tried to prevent the removal of this ordinance from the Constitution, claiming that since it was part of the Constitution, it could only be removed by a two-thirds majority, which the Awami League did not have in the parliament. However, when the question was taken to the courts it was ruled that since the ordinance had been inserted in the Constitution "ultra-vires" by decree, it could be removed with a simple majority.

The trials of the assassins, their extraditions and convictions played out in a sensational manner in the Dhaka newspapers during the fall of 1998 and spring of 1999. During that time, several "killing fields" were uncovered by the public works department. Skulls of children and babies and arm bones still tied together at the wrist were recovered.

Families of the intellectuals murdered on December 14, and other victims of *razakar* violence, filed cases against individuals known to have been involved in torture and murder, most of whom had become prominent citizens. Relatives of the deceased who were filing the cases were often threatened by the fundamentalists. Six years later, with the BNP-Islamicist coalition in power, these same

retired *razakars*, who escaped justice through Mujib's benevolence and their own wealth and political clout, are now part of the government.

According to information supplied by a scholar from Bangladesh, "The cases [against Mujib's assassins] are [still] in the Supreme Court, naturally—since most got the death sentence and appealed". He added, "But the current bench is doing everything ... to delay final verdicts—not enough justices appointed; those who are there, recusing themselves on various accounts".

The BNP/Jamaat coalition has not reinstated the Indemnity Ordinance that pardoned Mujib's murders, but they did institute a 'New Indemnity Clause' that was passed and signed into law in December 2002, in order to "protect the Armed Forces Personnel from any legal proceeding as a result of their actions in response to the Prime Minister's order to restore law and order and round up the usual suspects"<sup>94</sup>.

In BNP-controlled Bangladesh, the "usual suspects" are journalists and professors who have worked for justice and dedicated themselves to bringing the criminals of 1971 and 1975 to trial. During the time that Awami League was in power, there were also politically motivated arrests, though not to the degree as the current BNP regime.

Regardless of the changes made to the textbooks by the military governments or the Awami League, neither of them has been able to write the history of Bangladesh after January 10, 1972. There is far too much contentiousness about events such as November 7, 1975, when the military "came out of the cantonment" following the murder of

Sheikh Mujib and his family. For the BNP, this represents the finest moment, when the brave soldiers rose to the occasion to take control of the lawlessness that followed in the wake of the assassination of Mujib. For the Awami League, this date sealed the fateful end of democracy and ushered in an era of dictatorships and the erosion of freedom and human rights.

### November 7, A Tale of Two Tales

In Bangladesh, there are some issues in the recent history, such as the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in August 1975, and the military takeover on November 7 of that year, that are simply too controversial to include in officially published textbooks—in a nation divided by political partisanship. When Bangladeshi scholars told me in 1999 that the historical narrative would soon be updated to include events in post-liberation (post-1971) Bangladesh, I asked them, whose version would be included? They inevitably responded, “We will stick to the facts... just the facts.”

However, it is the interpretation of the facts that creates the problems: Were the events of November 7, 1975 a ruthless army coup that ended democracy? Or does this date represent the valiant efforts by the military to bring order and peace to a nation beset with chaos and violence, saving Bangladesh from being subsumed by India, or returned to Pakistan in a CIA inspired conspiracy, as the BNP and Bangladeshi scholars such as M. Rashiduzaman have argued?

A special supplement of the Dhaka newspaper, the *Daily Star* published on November 7, 1998 devoted a whole page to this dispute. At the top of the page was a reproduction of a political poster showing Zia wearing shades, waving to the crowds of cheering Bangladeshis. A tank was superimposed at the bottom of this circa 1993 political poster. Behind Zia on the right are rows of military personnel with their rifles raised. A large caption, pasted across the bottom of this poster, with the edges of the scotch tape visible, "Today is The National Revolution and Solidarity Day, 1993".

This poster of General Zia waving while wearing his trademark sunglasses, reprinted in the special supplement was created during the first BNP stint at the center. The feature in the *Daily Star* was titled, "Significance of a National Day should not be Mixed up with Politics". The three articles were all sympathetic to the BNP's view of November 7, 1975. One of the articles, *Alive in the Hearts of the People*, written by Sadeq Khan, explained,

For two decades since 1975, the citizens of Bangladesh have been enjoying a holiday on November 7 to commemorate the day of Sepoy-People uprising. That day in 1975 changed their lives, put an end to chaotic bids for power after the fall of Sheikh Mujib's Baksal raj, defeated a foreign interventionist bid, and firmly asserted the spirit of independence.

Another article in the November 7, 1998 supplement of the *Daily Star*, was written by Professor M. Maniruzzaman

Miah. It was a first person account of the events of the day, describing the heroics of Zia, and his humility. When the Awami League came back to power in 1996, they abolished November 7 as a national holiday. An article by Mahbub Anam, explained, that the

7th of November is the mutiny day. Some people observe it and some do not because of their political differences. [...] Putting a notable significance on it, the previous governments [first Ershad, then the BNP] used to glorify the day on behalf of the nation. They termed it the day of revolution and consolidation. It was also declared [a] holiday. But after coming to power the present government [Awami League] had cancelled the holiday.

On the reverse side of this page devoted to justifying the events of November 7, was an article, titled, "Hold trial of 42,000 political killings" that described a seminar held in Dhaka on November 6, 1998, "Today's Bangladesh and Importance of November 7".<sup>95</sup> The list of participants took up two columns. Their joint statement said, "Before holding trial of the killing of Sheikh Mujib, it is necessary to hold the trial of 42,000 political killings staged in early 70s."

In the Fall of 1998, the trial of Mujib's murderers had been in full swing for months. The verdicts, to have been pronounced on November 7, were delayed to avoid possible violent repercussions on National Revolution and Solidarity Day—though the holiday had been cancelled by the Awami League. The headlines on November 9, 1998 were

sensational. Fifteen assassins had been condemned to death. But the demand for a trial of the murderers of 40,000 Bengalis and non-Bengalis that were killed after the country was made independent is still a burning issue with scholars associated with the BNP perspective.<sup>96</sup> The violence and corruption in the first few years of Bangladeshi nationhood is often cited by BNP supporters as the reason Sheikh Mujib had to die.

At the November 7, 1998 seminar, Aftab Ahmed, a professor from Dhaka University, lectured that "the Awami League government during 1972-75 killed nearly 42,000 political activists and imprisoned about 86,000 leaders and workers". Ahmed stated that after 1971 "the fascist government created a chaos in Bangladesh unleashing repressive measure on the opposition". He said the "Rakkhi Bahini under the supervision of the Indian army committed those political killings". He "warned" that "the government's attempt to take political revenge in the name of trial of Sheikh Mujib killing will not bring any good result". This short article quotes from the participants at the seminar and offers an excellent example of the radical divergence of historical orientation in Bangladesh. In his lecture, Dr. Aftab also made this harsh and partisan statement, "The nation got rid of suffocating situation with the killing of Sheikh Mujib".

Another participant, Prof. Muniruzzaman "questioned why Awami League got feared (sic) of late President Ziaur Rahman and is spreading falsehood to undermine him and (sic) erase from history". He concluded that "lakhs of people had listened to the proclamation of liberation war in 1971

by Ziaur Rahman". The bone of contention continues. Owning history is integral.

Professor Emajuddin said at the seminar that the, "Awami League wants to cast off Ziaur Rahman from history where Sheikh Mujib failed". The article ended with a veiled threat for another military takeover. One professor, Reazuddin Ahmad advocated street violence to bring down the Awami League government, another scholar, Amanullah Kabir called for a military coup, "a situation has been created for another November 7".

This perspective of Bangladeshi history is shared by Professor M. Rashiduzaman, who in 1998-99, participated in a heated discussion on a Bangladeshi news service, Amitech. He had been accused of being a collaborator in 1971. In his defense he wrote several long letters. He discussed the differences of opinion regarding Mujib,

Over the years, about a dozen or so books/memoirs have been published in Bangladesh on what happened in 1971 and immediately after independence. Two key conceptualizations about Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's (also called Mujib and acclaimed as the Bangabandhu by millions)<sup>97</sup> role in the liberation struggle emerged: In the first assumption, Mujib, driven by the Pakistani refusal to transfer power to his majority party, was categorically in favor of a complete secession from Pakistan, which he hinted on March 7, and he gave further directives for declaration of independence subsequently carried out from the Chittagong Radio station.

Rashiduzaman stated that in the second assumption, Mujib is seen as incompetent, and "Unable to decide which way to go, either for united Pakistan with the six-point autonomy, or for a complete secession". Rashiduzaman then describes the events of the night of March 25, 1971 very differently than usually narrated,

Mujib decided to surrender to the Pakistan military leaving behind his followers to flee the country, to get killed by the marauding Pakistani soldiers, and to carry out the independence movement on their own.

In his defense of himself, against those who called him a collaborator Rashiduzaman implies that Mujib was also a collaborator. He cites, "Zulfi Bhutto's biographer Stanley Wolpert", who wrote about Mujib's secretly taped conversation (with Bhutto) where the Bangladeshi hero hinted at some form of connection with Pakistan shortly before he was freed from the detention in January 1972.<sup>98</sup>

Rashiduzaman points out that "The dispassionate historians have umpired none of those views; and, meanwhile, people argue both ways". Back in 1998 when this on-line controversy was happening, the media in Bangladesh was obsessed with historiography. Rashiduzaman noted this as well, "Dhaka newspapers are filled with claims and counter-claims about Mujib's role in the 1971 liberation struggle". He added, "We know that the acrimony between Prime Minister Hasina and the Opposition Leader Khaleda is also a battle over who did what in 1971". He mentions the same controversy that was

cited above from the November 7, 1998 edition of the *Daily Star*, "Just this week, I read that Opposition Leader Khaleda wanted trial for nearly 40,000 people killed from 1972 to 75." He states emphatically, continuing to defend himself, "The 'collaborators' did not commit those killings!"

Rashiduzaman goes so far as to defend the *razakars*, "Even those who actually collaborated, many were forced to join the Al-Badars etc. under duress." He explains that "After December 1971, most of such people were on the run" and that "the killing, torture, abduction, extortion and rape continued! Political killings were institutionalized".

Rashiduzaman greatly angered several of the contributors to the discussion on the *Amitech News From Bangladesh* internet site when he wrote that he was now being accused of collaboration when he himself had been victimised by the "ultra-nationalist fervor" during "the dark days of early Bangladesh when "Bengalee Nationalism" took a xenophobic and fascistic turn".

One contributor wrote that it was an insult that Rashiduzaman "characterized our struggle to free the country—when an estimated three million people gave their life—as merely a ultra-nationalist fervor". Another said that Dr. M. Rashiduzaman took "a snipe ... at the whole nation" by calling "Bengali Nationalism" "xenophobic and fascistic". This writer, critical of Rashiduzaman continued, "I was numbed and felt insulted to his characterisation of early days of Bangladesh, which just suffered the second highest casualties next to holocaust."

The discussion about the political position Rashiduzaman took while he was living in New York during

the War of Liberation and that he continues to take in his scholarly articles, is an excellent example of the deep divisions concerning the writing of Bangladeshi history. In one of his several letters written to defend himself, Rashiduzaman made a statement that was as true in 1998 when he wrote it, and as it is now, "A definitive history of Bangladesh in 1971, minus the political hyperbole, is yet to be written". He cites, "Doubts, fear, oscillation, vacillation, confusion and uncertainty" as the cause.<sup>99</sup> Rashiduzaman inferred that if events in Bangladesh were reevaluated, Mujib might even be considered to have been a collaborator.

When this internet debate was raging among cyber-centric Bangladeshi intellectuals in 1997-98, the holiday commemorating November 7 as National Revolution and Solidarity Day had been abolished by the Awami League. As soon as the BNP returned to power in October 2001, the National Revolution and Solidarity Day holiday was reinstituted and celebrated. However, after two-and-a-half decades, the events of that day still cannot be written up in textbooks.

Though it is discussed extensively on newsgroups dedicated to issues about Bangladesh, and numerous books taking different sides of the story have been published, Bangladeshi school children don't read about this day in their textbooks. They also don't read about the murder of Mujib. A.H. Jaffor Ullah, in his incisive, acerbic style evaluates the current situation,

The existence of these two opposing views in Bangladesh is creating many problems for this nascent

democracy. The nation is not quite sure who their founding fathers were. Unfortunately, most of the founding fathers were assassinated by a gang of junior army officers under the leadership of a senior officer who consolidated his power base in subsequent period after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib. Even though 25 years have gone by, our people in Bangladesh are confused as ever. They don't know whether they want to erect the portrait of Sheikh Mujib, the acknowledged leader of the Bangalee nationalism, or the picture of four-star General who was merely a sector commander during our fight against the 'Hanadar Bahini.'<sup>100</sup> The present government of Bangladesh with their heightened anti-Bangalee sentiment wanted to take down the picture of Sheikh Mujib, which this scribe thinks is a wrong idea. Bangladesh should march to modernity with or without Sheikh Mujib's or Rayban spectacled army General.

Sheikh Mujib's death in August 1975 was a tragedy that ended democracy in Bangladesh for 17 years, though some claim that the one party rule he had established before he was killed had already destroyed democracy.<sup>101</sup> A few months later, General Zia-ur Rahman came to power through a coup.<sup>102</sup> During his tenure, General Zia re-established closer ties with Islamabad, meeting with Z.A. Bhutto who had become the prime minister of the now truncated Pakistan. Zia legitimized his undemocratic rule through founding the BNP, and having himself installed as president. He followed the tactics of the military rulers in

undivided Pakistan, such as General Ayub Khan, and now, in that on-going tradition, General Musharraf who has also justified his coup through this pseudo-political strategy.

During the first years of the country's existence, 1972-75 there had been violence and murder against those considered collaborators. However, most of the worst offenders survived the witch hunts to haunt the nation for thirty-one years. Political murders and instability also marked the years General Zia-ur Rahman was in quasi-control of the Bangladeshi government, 1975-81. He personally ordered the execution by firing squad and hanging of over 2000 soldiers, many of whom had distinguished themselves as freedom fighters, but who opposed his takeover of the government, in one way or another. Zia was very partisan in whom he pardoned for attempted coups and whom he executed.

The two infamous majors, Rashid and Farooq, who masterminded the murder of Sheikh Mujib, his family and colleagues, were given safe passage out of the country twice. Once after the murder of Mujib and again after they staged a failed counter coup against General Zia. Other comrades in arms were not so fortunate or favoured, such as Colonel Taher, who was not murderous and power hungry, as were the two favoured majors. Taher was a patriot with leftist socialist ideas. He organised the mutiny among the troops, demanding rights which led to the elevation of Zia to chief marshal law administrator and then to president. Zia had Taher executed, while *razakars* and other scoundrels responsible for murder and extortion were not only pardoned but given lucrative positions abroad.

The colourful and courageous Colonel Taher was hung by Zia, though it was his inspiration and vision of an egalitarian "People's Army" that led to the Sepoy<sup>103</sup> mutiny. Major Taher is one of the unsung, in fact, completely obliterated heroes. If an objective history of Bangladesh can one day be written, Taher will be known as one of the truly unique and committed characters of the early years of the country.

During Zia's term as head of state, there were numerous counter-coups and over 20 assassination attempts on his life before he was finally gunned down in 1981. The facts of his murder are particularly gruesome. The contrasts between his assassination and burial and that of Sheikh Mujib paint a lucid picture of the vivid ironies in Bangladesh's painful, convoluted recent past.

What remained of Zia's remains, once it was unburied from a shallow grave after a few days of decay, was interned with pomp and pageantry in a stylishly modernistic mausoleum in Dhaka near the Parliament building in a park named after him.<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, Mujib's body lay head down on the stairwell of his home for several hours and then was hastily buried in an unmarked grave in his hometown far away from Dhaka. His bullet riddled body, unceremoniously removed from his home in Dhanmudi, was quietly flown in a helicopter to Tungipara and buried within twenty-four hours.<sup>105</sup> The rest of the family, the women and children, daughters-in-law and sons, were dumped in a mass grave on the other side of Dhaka. Mascarenhas wrote in 1986,

Ten years after Mujib's death his daughter, Hasina, told me that she could not get the agreement of relatives and neighbors in their home village of Tungipara to erect a suitable monument over Mujib's grave.

Tito Scohel, a Bangladeshi activist and scholar, wrote at length about this ironic situation,

Zia always loved to glorify himself as he did during the liberation war. His cronies, always powerful behind the screen, fed Zia's urges for mythopoesis. After his death Zia was spiritualized in Bangladeshi politics. Sheikh Mujib's dead body was taken to Tungipara and buried in the same day. But Zia's dead body wasn't taken to [his hometown] Bogra. Instead a big monument was erected overnight on Zia's grave next to the parliament house at the heart of Dhaka city.

Why so much honor was accorded to an ordinary major or a sector commander of 1971 while the architect of the liberation war was literally buried out of sight of the whole nation? The answer is simple: to spiritualize Zia into fine political ideology. To let his apparition haunt the nation in the perpetual medievalism. In Bangladeshi culture tombs are more powerful than the living men. The present being an irrecoverable squalor, the past appears to wield a more glittering prospect. Due to these cultural factors it was important for Zia's mentors to perpetuate his tomb in our political culture and drive Mujib out of the national phantasmagoria.

Zia stands for an ideology and is represented by an oligarchy (pro Pakistan) determined to perpetuate Islamic culture in Bangladesh. For last 15 years this group deified Zia cult, as part of their process, to obliterate Mujib and liberation war from our history. In order to secure their political hegemony, this group created a myth with Zia's corpse. For the fact is Zia's dead body was never brought to Dhaka. His dead body, due to the impact of heavy brush fire, was so much enmeshed with flesh, blood and other dead bodies (his body guards) that it was unidentifiable.<sup>106</sup>

Ultimately, during his tumultuous tenure, Zia changed Mujib's concept of "Bengalee Nationalism" to "Bangladeshi Nationalism". In 1977, when there was a revision of textbooks, the story about the War of Liberation was still fresh and bloody in the minds of the people, so not many changes could be made to the story. He added a few significant sentences—changing names to obscure the perpetrators and omitting details, particularly concerning the role of Sheikh Mujib. These changes were significant in the sensitive issue of Bangladeshi identity formation.

A.H. Jaffor Ullah a Bangladeshi scholar who lives in New Orleans, described this process in an article written in the fall of 2002, *A divided nation after 31 years of independence*<sup>107</sup>.

Bangladesh was ruled by two successive army juntas who did away with the spirit of 1971. The country was

ruled by anti-secular forces for the period 1975 through 1991. During that period, the school textbooks were re-written to thwart the spirit of 1971. An entire generation of kids grew up in Bangladesh without really knowing what their father's generation had to undergo and what sacrifices were needed to liberate this nation of Bangladesh from the evil clutch of Pak army and their yes men—Rajakars, Jamaatis, Al-Badars, Al-Shams, and an entire slue of Fifth Columnists who aided the army of Gens. Tikka and Niazi. The country was also pushed towards a path of rapid Islamisation. Thanks to easy petro-dollars from the Saudis and UAR Sheikdoms.

One sad aspect of this battle for the soul of Bangladesh, is that this nation, that will soon have its thirty-second birthday has been a land without a father figure. When I was in Bangladesh in 1998-99, Mujib's photos were everywhere. Now, since October 2001, photos of General Zia adorn all the office walls. In Pakistan, Jinnah is in every airport and post office, his photos everywhere for all posterity—Quaid-e-Azam, forever. In India, Gandhi is on all the rupee notes, his statue at intersections and in parks, his photo is ubiquitous. He is Mahatma, Bapu to ten crores<sup>108</sup> of Indians. But in Bangladesh, there is a sense of illegitimacy... the citizens can't remember or can't agree who is the father of their country.

This was brought dramatically to my attention in August 1999, when I was on an airplane from Dhaka to Calcutta.

I struck up a conversation with several Bangladeshi passengers. Quite an intelligent and interesting discussion ensued between myself and two college students about my research into competing histories. As we were landing, a Bangladeshi lady in the seat in front of us, turned around and said in a loud, almost angry voice that "Mujib is not the father of the country and calling him the father of the country is a lie". She gave me her card, she was a member of the BNP, she told me to contact her for the "real story of the freedom movement".

She was adamant in her denouncement of Sheikh Mujib. I told her that all countries had a father, like George Washington in the USA and Mahatma Gandhi in India. She responded that "most Bangladeshis don't consider Mujib to be the father of the country, it is all Awami League propaganda". By the time she finished speaking in a rather pompous voice, the seat belt sign was turned off, and literally dozens of Bangladeshi passengers approached and said, "Don't listen to her". They yelled at her that she was a fool and didn't know the "real" history of her country. Luckily, there were no altercations, while the stewardesses watched on nervously. I waited and let the BNP lady off the plane in front of me.

In the airport, more Bangladeshi passengers came up to me while we were waiting for our luggage and apologized for the lady's comments. They assured me that Sheikh Mujib could be considered the "father of the country". But the division was plain to see, an acrimonious uncertainty about a very sensitive and personal issue. One of the students I had been conversing with on the airplane, said to me, his

eyes full of sorrow, "Bangladeshis have a collective memory loss. We've forgotten our past. We don't know who our father is. We're like a bastard child longing for a source of identity".

A.H. Jaffor Ullah wrote about this problem, explaining that other "countries have no qualms about who their father figure is",

No one in Pakistan frets about Muhammad Ali Jinnah not being their national hero. They adore Jinnah so much in Pakistan that many in Pakistan think that his real name is Quaid-e-Azam. Similarly, M.K. Gandhi is revered so much that his portrait is seen in every office. Throughout Turkey one will see monuments to honor Kemal Atatürk. If this is the way a grateful nation shows respect to their founding fathers, then what is the problem with Bangalees from Bangladesh? Are we such an ungrateful bunch that we do not show our gratitude to the founding fathers of our motherland?

Jaffor Ullah continued, concerned that such a serious disagreement about such an essential issue, as who is the father of the country, will keep his native land in turmoil. If they can't agree on something which should be a simple fact of history, how will they find balance in other spheres?

[A]n evil design well executed in the late 1970s had taken its toll. Because of this horrendous campaign our motherland is now divided by a fault line. I don't see much hope for this ingratitude nation in the coming

decades. Think about if in America a debate is still raging about who is their founding father. A country that is divided as is the case in Bangladesh will have a slim chance to succeed. While other nations will march towards prosperity, Bangladesh folks will debate ad infinitum who is their real leader even though the historians are unanimous about it.

Professor Jaffor Ullah may be overly optimistic that historians are "unanimous" on the paternal parentage of Bangladesh. The BNP lady on the airplane certainly had the opposite opinion, and her party is now again in power. The college student who was so saddened by the confusion, that it brought tears to his eyes, like a fatherless child, is lost in the competitions. That question with all its shrill public contestations and sorrowful internalizations will be raging for the foreseeable future.

## Political Overdose

An article appeared in the *Daily Star*, on May 07, 2003, titled, "Political overdose for primary students".<sup>109</sup> It told about the tit-for-tat publishing of politically motivated quasi-historical books that are pushed on the school children of Bangladesh. This article described the ups and downs of publishing based on the rise and fall of political fortunes. It also highlighted the mega-egos of governmental leaders, who while in power, commission books about themselves and/or their deceased family members.

In his article subtitled, *18 books on the Zias, many authored by selection committee members, wives and friends*, Mustak Hossain reveals the bias in the selection of books. These are not history textbooks, but Bangla language readers published at government expense.

A committee has selected 18 books on late president Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as rapid readers for primary students. Political bias rather than contents was pivotal in selecting 14 books on

Ziaur Rahman and four on Khaleda, alleged sources in the publishing industry.

The journalist explains the cronyism and nepotism that had guided the process. He quotes his sources in the publishing industry who "alleged" that "the motive behind the selection was *not only to please the ruling BNP* but to promote unfamiliar books" (emphasis added). His sources informed him that, "Many of the enlisted books were authored by committee members, their wives and friends". It is no surprise that this government appointed committee was partisan, it was established with that expectation, as are all such politically motivated bodies. The committee "also recommended five books written by Professor Jahanara Begum" a supporter of the BNP and "advisor of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) with a state minister status". Committee members promoted their own books in lieu of those of more respected scholars,

The committee ... ignored the books of noted authors like Begum Sufia Kamal,<sup>110</sup> Shawkat Osman, Hassan Azizul Huq, Dr Anisuzzaman<sup>111</sup> and Humayun Azad.

The author of this article, Mustak Hossain gives the names of numerous other authors whose Bangla language books were chosen, all associated with the current regime, or serving as members of the book selection committee.<sup>112</sup>

Hossain points out that due to the fact that the BNP came to power in a coalition with the Islamic parties, "The

list of 250 books selected for different areas of Bangladesh also includes many on Islamic ideology". These politically motivated "rapid readers" which are actually more like pamphlets designed for younger students rather than full fledged textbooks, will be published by "the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB)" that "has floated a tender on procurement of about 2.22 lakh<sup>113</sup> copies of the books on primary and mass education." Hossain reports that "the government will spend several crore<sup>114</sup> taka on the yearly project". Yearly, that is, while the BNP remains in office. If they are voted out then these politically motivated readers will be recalled and new readers about Awami League heroes will be published.

"Professor Wakil Ahmed of Dhaka University" who headed the committee," though he "declined to comment on the selection of 14 books on Ziaur Rahman and four on Khaleda", explained that the committee "tried to accommodate good books. But we could not always ensure quality". As an alibi for the asymmetrical selection process that chose books of inferior quality because they were politically popular with the BNP, Professor Wakil Ahmed excused himself saying, "We live in a sickening society...".

The author of the *Daily Star* article, commented that "Writers like Satyajit Ray and Mohammad Zafar Iqbal and national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam were not included". Though these authors are renowned for their beautiful use of the Bangla language, and as such would naturally be chosen for language readers, they were ignored in favour of political pamphlets about BNP leaders. The "sources say the committee selected ...only one book each of Rabindranath

Tagore,<sup>115</sup> Shamsur Rahman and Jasimuddin [and] of a few others like the three, *only to cover up its political bias*" (emphasis added).

Hossain's sources who repeatedly requested anonymity, said "The books are not available... [in] the city's bookshops... as they are project-oriented". This anonymous publisher explained, "Those books are not meant for all". "Another publisher alleged" that though "Eight hundred books were submitted to the NCTB when it invited samples and proposals.... *not all were selected on merit*" (emphasis added). Hossain writes that "The committee enlisted at least a dozen biographical books on Ziaur Rahman". He lists their titles. He also gives the titles of the four biographical "books on Khaleda". Hossain adds that "Earlier, a committee selected as many as 52 books on Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia for public and college libraries". At the end of the article, the journalist explains that this lop-sided selection criteria had also occurred during the previous government,

In the past, the Awami League also enlisted books for libraries on political considerations. During its rule, the AL selected as many as 34 books on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, seven on AL President Sheikh Hasina and 13 written by pro-AL intellectuals.

A second article on this topic by the same author appeared ten days latter in the *Daily Star*,<sup>116</sup> titled *History in tunnel vision: College books depict Liberation War the BNP*

way.<sup>117</sup> Mustak Hossain, who has obviously taken a great interest in this issue wrote,

College students will now learn one-sided history of the Liberation War as a government project has selected all the books under the category relating to the war, influenced by the ruling BNP, sources in the education sector alleged.

He lists the names of numerous books, "selected ... under the Liberation War category" which include books about the "late president Ziaur Rahman and ... Prime Minister Khaleda Zia". One of the books was called, *President Zia Kemal Atatürk of Bangladesh*.<sup>118</sup> "Another book selected" about the Liberation War was written by the current BNP minister of "Health and Family Welfare".<sup>119</sup> One "educationist, who asked not to be named", said

There are a large number of books on the liberation struggle and it is not understandable why only three books by persons belonging to a certain political quarter have been selected.

The educationist lamented, "students would not be able to get a total picture of the liberation struggle from those books, rather they will get a one-sided view". In addition to the "18 books on late president Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia", there are "17 books on the life and works of Ziaur Rahman and three on Khaleda Zia ... in two categories ... liberation war and reference books".

"Worse still", writes Hossain, editorializing his negative reaction that was undoubtedly shared by tens of millions of "Banglaeese" who had lived through 1971, "*Worse still*,"<sup>120</sup> a book written by a former Pakistani General Rao Farman Khan—The Birth of Bangladesh—has been enlisted as a reference book".

This bit of information must have sent shivers down the spines of historians like Muntasir Mamoon. Dr. Mamoon did extensive research into the Pakistan general's responsible for implementing Operation Searchlight on March 26 in Dhaka, and directing the ensuing nine months of atrocities against Bengali civilians in 1971. Rao Farman is renowned in Bangladesh as the Pakistani general responsible for the murder of the intellectuals on December 14, 1971.

The journalist mentions the BNP government's cancellation of several orders of secondary level books "due to various irregularities and political consideration in selecting the books". He again informs his readers that, "Last year, a committee selected as many as 52 books on Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia for public and college libraries". But to be fair, as in his previous article, Hossain explains, "Political consideration started getting priority in the selection of books when Awami League (AL) came to power in 1996". He puts the BNP side of the drama into perspective,

During the AL rule, books for public libraries were selected on political consideration. Besides, 34 books on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, seven on

AL President Sheikh Hasina and 13 written by pro-AL intellectuals were selected at that time.

But the words, "Worse still" were still ringing in the readers' ears... "Rao Farman Ali<sup>121</sup> ... the person responsible for the murder of the intellectuals in 1971".<sup>122</sup>

### The Return of Rao Farman Ali

Muntassir Mamoon wrote in his authentically researched book, *The Vanquished Generals*, that of all the generals he interviewed in Pakistan, Rao Farman Ali was the coldest and most calculated. Rao Farman left behind his diary when he fled Dhaka in December 1971. A page of "Rao Farman Ali's diary ... found in Banga Bhaban" is reproduced in Muntissar Mamoon's book. On this page is a "List of intellectuals to be murdered" written in Farman's own hand. His complicity in genocide and in particular in the murder of the intellectuals is undeniable.

He is guilty, except as he represents himself in his vision of the creation of Bangladesh, as narrated in his own book, which has now become suggested reading for Bangladeshi students. Though Farman denies his part in the genocide, many other Pakistanis blame him for planning and executing the level of violence that was used against the Bengalis. Farman had written in his now famous diary, "Green land of East Pakistan will be painted red".

Mamoon cites, "Hasan Zahir, a Pakistani civil servant at that time", who in his book, *The Separation of East Pakistan* wrote, "Major General Farman Ali was the executor of

Dhaka part of 'Searchlight'. He succeeded in 'shock action' by concentrated and indiscriminate firing on the target areas". According to Muntassir Mamoon, General Niazi, in his book about the creation of Bangladesh, "reserved his fiercest wrath for Rao Farman Ali." Niazi told Mamoon that as they were evacuating East Pakistan, Rao Farman begged Niazi to take him to India to surrender, he was afraid that

Mukti Bahini would kill him for his alleged massacre of the Bangalis and intellectuals on the night of 15/16th December. It was a pathetic sight to see him pale and almost on the verge of break-down.

Mamoon, states, about General Niazi's book, which was "dedicated to the *Razakars*" that it "is a must" read, to "understand the mind of the Pakistani Generals". Rao Farman Ali Khan's book is less palatable.

Nonetheless, beginning in 2002, the school children of Bangladesh have been advised to read Rao Farman Ali's book as a reference source. They have not been told to consider it critically, as recommended by Dr. Mamoon, to read against the text, to understand the methods of denial used by the Pakistani generals. Mamoon describes "how Farman Ali narrates his tale". He "perfectly understood" reality, but avoided it skillfully

So ultimately the book becomes a mish-mash of exaggerations, half-truths and truths. But he has concocted the whole story so cleverly that it may seem

believable to some readers. This is a good strategy for him, but disastrous for history or for the future.<sup>123</sup>

A quote from Farman Ali included in Mamoon's *The Vanquished Generals*, shows that he "advocated ...genocide" and excused the Pakistani Army's ruthlessness,

Some ... members exceeded their authority and killed a number of civil and police officials without proper trial. The Army was not able to control Biharis in taking revenge when badly affected areas were liberated by [Pakistani] Army.<sup>124</sup>

Professor Mamoon commented sarcastically, "neither he nor the Pakistan Army was responsible for the killing of the intellectuals; it was actually the freedom fighters or the Indian Army who did it!" Mamoon adds,

The Generals ... all seemed to agree that India had been conspiring to break apart Pakistan since 1947, and even our Liberation War was also the result of Indian conspiracies. Pakistani Generals have never managed [to] see past this illusion.<sup>125</sup>

Thirty years after the Liberation War, the children of Bangladesh have been advised to read Farman Ali's "lies" as a "reference source". Farman Ali was particularly friendly with Golam Azam and other leaders of the pro-Pakistani Bengali organizations such as the *razakars*. In 1971, Farman Ali was instrumental in forming the ironically named "Peace

Committees" that sponsored the blood-thirsty *razakars* and al-badars. Those retired *razakars*, former members of Farman Ali's terrorist squads, are now part of the BNP coalition government. They have brought forth the memoirs of their former mentor, the man responsible for not only the murders of intellectuals on December 14, 1971, but the architect of Operation Searchlight. For those Bangladeshis who still admire the heroics of the freedom struggle, it came as a shock that Rao Farman Ali's view of the Liberation War is now promoted by the Government of Bangladesh.

During the past decade, since the return of democracy, the pendulum of historiography in Bangladesh has been swinging back and forth. As long as the divisions in society are as deep as they are, history will never find its balance. Until then, the continuing story of the nation cannot be told in history textbooks in Bangladesh, and only Farman Ali's propaganda, and hagiographies of General Zia are added to the recommended reading list.

## The Ghosts of the Generals

The historical narrative in Bangladesh has once again experienced a catharsis. This pendulum swing is more of a backslide, lapsing into the opposite direction of the rewriting that occurred in 1996 when the Awami League held the reigns of government. Since October 2001, when the BNP again won the elections by a slim margin, they have used this opportunity to re-seize the historical narrative, overturning the facts students were required to memorize for the past six years.

The school children in Bangladesh, will for the next six years, while the BNP has control of the Parliament and the NCTB, read in their textbooks that General Zia declared independence. They will read nothing about the *razakars*. Since those same *razakars* are now part of the ruling coalition, their bloodied role in opposing the liberation of the nation, cannot be included in the narrative. This dynamic example of shifting conversations in historical narrations from Bangladesh typifies the transitional nature of the historical narrative, but it is an extreme case.

The new post-October 2001 textbooks were not published in English, just Bengali. The Awami League books, published in 1997 and 1998, were the first English translations of NCTB textbooks after 1971 since the years of East Pakistan. Because so much of Bengali identity revolved around their love for their language, no English language subject specific textbooks were published by NCTB until 1997. Though there were English medium schools in Dhaka and elsewhere, Bengali medium was strongly encouraged.

In the 2001 BNP era textbooks, both Zia and Mujib are said to have declared independence—a compromise on the part of the BNP. However, in that newly scripted paragraph, Mujib's name comes once, Zia's twice. The event is not described in the very academic style found in the Awami League textbooks, who took the rewrite of this paragraph dead seriously. In the new BNP version, the paragraph is shorter. Zia's role is described with more ambivalence, rather than the factually detailed manner that it had been delineated in the 1998 Awami League version. In that telling, Zia was represented as just one of the many who declared independence "in Mujib's name" between March 25-27, 1971.

Several things were added into the textbooks in 1998 when they were radically revised after the Awami League came to power. One of the most important additions was a strong condemnation of the *razakars*, specifically naming the Islamic fundamentalist group, the Jamaat-i-Islami, who collaborated with the Pakistan Army throughout the war, and murdered the intellectuals on December 16, 1971. The

Jamaat-i-Islami, who is now sharing the reigns of power with Mrs. Zia's BNP, made sure those lines were immediately removed from the textbooks.

In 1997, the Jamaat had lodged a case against the NCTB for putting those sentences in the textbooks, which accused them of collaboration and murder—stating that the Jamaat, et al, had been *razakars* and anti-liberation forces during the Liberation War in support of Pakistan. The law suit was eventually thrown out of court. My informant at the NCTB spoke about several of these issues in the spring of 1999, when the Awami League was still in power,

Thank God; thank the Honorable court justice that the petition is reported to have been declared void prima-facie. Now think of the audacity of those enemies of humanity, who were directly or indirectly reared and nourished and utilized for two decades. It is the irony of our national history that none of these butchers is known to have been punished; on the contrary the freedom fighters, patriot, intellectual and persons of liberal and progressive ideas often fall prey to their fanaticism and ferocity.

Since its inception as a nation, the Islamicist mandate in the realm of electoral politics was never validated in Bangladesh. Until the election of October 2001, the Jamaat-i-Islami candidates or other fundamentalist parties won few seats in the parliament. In Pakistan as well, they had never received more than eight percent of the votes, up until the contrived elections held by Musharraf in Octo-

ber 2002. In both nations, regardless of their lack of electoral clout through the years, nevertheless the Islamic fundamentalists wielded a tremendous amount of influence in society. Now, in both nations, they are in control of the reigns of power and their mandates may proceed unchecked, which often include curtailing the social and educational rights of women and encouraging violent jihadi elements.

In Bangladesh, the Jamaat-i-Islami were not politically influential, winning only three seats in the previous election. But in October 2001, they came to power riding on a wave of anti-Americanism, raising alarms that Islam is in danger due to the "war on terror". Prior to the last election, their unpopularity was due in part because they were seen as collaborators, and are especially reviled for the brutal slaying of hundreds of intellectuals in Dhaka on December 14, 1971. Because of this tarnished history in the creation of the nation, the Islamicists have received minimal electoral support. Things have changed. A friend of mine from Dhaka, whose uncle was murdered on December 16, is very unhappy that Golam Azam's party is now part of the government of his country. He told me, that

It wasn't Golam Azam's buddies—it was he himself who helped the Pakistani junta to prepare the list which contained my uncle's name! An extended list contained my dad's name; had the war lasted for only another week or so... my life could've been quite different.

During the past few decades, in villages and towns in Bangladesh, Jamaat-i-Islami activists have had an almost free reign to terrorize women and influence young male students who actively work to keep women from empowering themselves politically and socially. Now that they are part of the ruling coalition there are many people in Bangladesh who fear for their lives, and rightly so. Many of the people whom I interviewed when I was in Dhaka in 1998 and '99 have been arrested—charged with insulting the nation. Their crimes? They reported on the human rights abuses being carried out against the Hindu minority since the October 2001 elections.<sup>126</sup>

Back in January 2001, there seemed to be a reprieve from the *fatwas* and coercion in a sensational high court judgement that made the international media. In an editorial from *The Friday Times*, Najam Sethi commented

Bangladesh High Court in Dhaka [that] handed down a judgment of great significance to all Muslim-majority countries that claim democratic statehood. They said that religious fatwas or edicts purporting to be Islamic law issued by maulvis, maulanas, muftis or other religio-political leaders are illegal and should be liable to punishment as any other illegality.<sup>127</sup>

The court decision included a critique of madrassa education, pointing out that “a particular group of men, upon getting education from madrassas or forming a religious group, are becoming fanatics with wrong views”.

According to an Amnesty International press statement released on January 5, 2001,

dozens of fatwas are issued each year in Bangladesh by the rural clergy at village gatherings after receipt of complaints, usually against women who assert themselves in village family life. They impose flogging and stoning and other humiliating punishments such as shaving of heads, insults and beatings. They are also often involved in their execution.<sup>128</sup>

The Amnesty International report stated that in "many cases, there appears to be a financial motive involved. Fatwas can be a source of income for the local clergy, known as *Fatwabaz* (in fatwa business), who justify their deeds in the name of religion." The press release mentioned that "In October 2000, the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance reported that 26 fatwas issued in the previous year were an attempt 'to stifle any efforts to emancipate women'." The two justices of the "High Court, Mohammad Gholam Rabbani and Nazmun Ara Sultana—the first woman judge in the country" were threatened by Islamist groups who refused to accept the judgment. Dr. Kamal Hossain, who was a close associate of Sheikh Mujib and noted for authoring the original Constitution, was "instrumental in persuading the judges to rule against the clerics". He stated, "Fatwas are unconstitutional and against the fundamental rights."<sup>129</sup>

News reports from Bangladesh provided details about the response of the people to the daring ruling,

There was a perceptible sense of optimism and joy on the streets of Dhaka this New Year's day when the Bangladesh High Court, in a path-breaking judgment, declared all fatwas illegal. Human rights activists were jubilant because the judgment, they say, was a decisive blow to the menace of religious fundamentalism in the country. Within hours, the celebrations had spilled on to the streets.

But there are many pessimists too. Many say the verdict is unlikely to end repression against women in a country where they still play a subservient role and where semi-literate religious leaders, especially in rural areas, rule the roost. The response of fundamentalists too has added to their fear.<sup>130</sup>

The verdict, however, has emboldened several victims to demand punishment against fatwa-happy local clerics. In the last one week alone, there have been at least a dozen newspaper reports of religious leaders fleeing their villages to escape the rising tide of public anger against them.<sup>131</sup>

Within ten months of this outpouring of relief, as women in rural areas were offered long denied protection from fatwas that were used to single females out for condemnation, the Mullahs have returned, bolstered by electoral victory. They now have a free reign to continue terrorizing common citizens, particularly the "uppity" women in rural Bangladesh. Given the current climate, the experience of my friend in a rickshaw after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, when soldiers yelled at her to cover her

head with a scarf, because the military was making Bangladesh an Islamic Republic, is becoming a reality.

### A BNP Ban on Intellectuals

The human rights situation in Bangladesh has degenerated since the October 2001 election. Given this situation, while reading this chapter, Professor Rodney Moag commented that it is not surprising that "the political climate influencing the choice of, and content in, textbooks has, if anything, intensified since 2001, and at the present there is little prospect for any amelioration in the highly politicized and one-sided approach to educational materials". Negative treatment of the minority groups may become the norm. Reports translated from Bengali sources, can be found on the web page of the Human Rights Commission Bangladesh (HRCB).

*The Daily Star* ran articles about violence against the minority community in some districts, and intimidation at the ballot box. Here is a brief excerpt from a much longer, and very gruesome report from the HRCB website,

15 thousands minority families dislodged in two districts: thousands of houses ablaze, hundreds of women raped (Translated from Bengali) Report from Janakantha, Oct 10, 2001.

Shahriar Kabir wrote about this tragedy that has not abated since October 2001. Annual reports on Bangladesh's state of human rights are regularly published by a number

of national and international organizations, including the 'United States State Department', 'Amnesty International', 'Transparency International, etc.. The reports on the situation in 2001 show that human rights situation has dangerously deteriorated in Bangladesh.

Shahriar Kabir and many others Bangladeshi intellectuals, have been arrested for trying to bring out the facts of the post-October pogrom, he wrote,

The fierce persecution against the religious minorities that started soon after the October, 2001, general elections still continues even after the lapse of one year. The main opposition Awami League and a large section of Bangladesh's civil society have opined that the election was 'unacceptable' to them as the voting was influenced in many ways, including intimidation of opposition supporters and religious minorities.

Kabir further explains the problem,

The issue of communal torture has many dimensions in Bangladesh. If we take the recent incidents of communal atrocities in Bangladesh and link them only to elections or politics then it will not be fair or accurate. We need to know the historical, political, geographical, economical, cultural and psychological aspects of communal problems of Bangladesh to understand it in its entirety.

Another journalist, Saleem Samad, told the story of his arrest,

"I should kill you," the high-ranking Dhaka policeman said. He drew his pistol from his holster, shoved me to the floor and pressed the muzzle to my temple. "You are a traitor. You have betrayed your country. How dare you describe the nation as a haven for al-Qaeda and the Taliban?"

Samad's February 10, 2003 article in *Time Asia*, describes the BBC crew he worked for and then discusses the current political situation,

The government holds power with the help of fundamentalist Islamic groups that are changing Bangladesh's secular character; local Hindus and Christians are fleeing to neighbouring India in the thousands, and the authorities are furious at media reports that Bangladesh is playing host to jihadis from Afghanistan and beyond. Rather than address these concerns, the government has systematically muzzled journalists and Opposition leaders who try to get the story out. Since October, more than 4,000 people have been arrested and 44 have died in custody during a government crackdown supposedly directed at organized crime and euphemistically called Operation Clean Heart.

In December 2002, I received an urgent message from the daughter of Muntassir Mamoon, a well known intellectual in Dhaka who had been instrumental in bringing attention to the issue of war crimes. I had interviewed him

and corresponded with him via email, so his daughter sent the desperate email to his mailing list. At the same time that this respected intellectual was arrested, so was Sheikh Hasina's secretary and dozens of others who were not sympathetic to the BNP government. Another letter arrived via email that explained the spate of arrests of intellectuals in Dhaka, "It is a long overdue matter considering the present regime's planned and organized move to eliminate intellectuals from Bangladesh, a mirror image of 1971 blue print of the Pakistani junta and the Jamaat led Rajakar/Al Badar force."

In a lecture, "Threats and intimidation for secular and independent press in Bangladesh", that was presented on the auspices of World Press Freedom Day, May 3, 2003, Saleem Samad, wrote about the serious curtailment of civil rights under the BNP.

The newspapers, journalists and columnists [who] ascertained traditional secular beliefs were targeted by the government since the coalition of pro-right and pro-Islamic came to power in October 2001. The worst experience where those who exposed the identity of the war criminals during the bloody war of independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and covered civil society's demand for trial of war criminals. Samad explains that "The government's acute paranoia contributed to the already existing level of violence against journalists". He quotes the Reporters Sans Frontiers Report on 2002, that called Bangladesh "by far the world's most violent country for journalists".

He cites that since the BNP came to power with the coalition of Islamists, "at least 250 journalists were assaulted or threatened with deaths, three journalists murdered, 30 newspaper offices or press clubs attacked and 25 journalists detained".

There is tremendous interest in historiography in Bangladesh, as if it were a national pastime. Articles about history and the debates that emerge, are regular topics of newspaper and magazine articles. However, there is a difference with the manner that the same topic plays out in India, where the media airs the dirty linen, with no holds barred. In India, the editors and journalists take strongly one sided positions, they have no demands for objectivity since there is no retaliation from the government when the newspapers print highly partisan editorial lampooning the current government. Many editors, such as N. Ram at *The Hindu* have taken a special interest in historiography, with a decidedly anti-BJP editorial stance. *The Hindu* often presents alternative viewpoints on this topic.

This can be contrasted to the state of the debate in Bangladesh, where articles do regularly appear in the press decrying the manipulation and distortion of history. In contrast to India, there is a more hesitant approach, trying not to step on the government's toes, while at the same time attempting to actually report on excesses and corruption. Unfortunately, as has been discussed in this chapter, freedom of the press is still in question in Bangladesh. There are many independent newspapers and some that are aligned with one political party or another.

*The Daily Star*, one of Dhaka's more successful and progressive newspapers is a model by any media standards. However, the pressures on journalists and editors in Bangladesh is not unfamiliar to those in Pakistan. For example, in Peshawar and other cities, newspapers offices are often trashed by madrassa trained youth in retaliation for some perceived transgression. Also when Nawaz Sharief was prime minister, he ordered the arrest of Najam Sethi, the editor of Lahore newsweekly, *The Friday Times*, simply for being critical of the ruling party, the Muslim League. Sethi's arrest and detention caused an international uproar.

In the public debate over textbooks in Bangladesh, issues are usually approached theoretically, as if the critiques will have little influence on the process itself. Perhaps intellectuals and journalists in Bangladesh were calloused by too many years of authoritarian governance, and have taken a fatalistic position, rather than a position on one side of the debate or the other. Taking a strong position in Bangladesh can be dangerous. Many journalists have been detained for reporting about the post-October 2001 persecution of the Hindu and Christian minority groups by gangs associated with the ruling parties. Just attempting to report about this issue got Shahriar Kabir arrested.

Ironically, the situation in today's Bangladesh can be contrasted to the days immediately following the crackdown on March 26, 1971. The Pakistani authorities sent all the journalists out of the country and those who managed to stow away, hide out, and continue reporting about the carnage, such as Anthony Mascarenhas, were on the run and wanted men. Nonetheless, that indomitable Bengali

resistance mentality and streak of intellectualism will prevail. Objective Bangladeshi scholars and reporters stake their lives on that objectivity. Unfortunately, today in Bangladesh that commitment is proving dangerous. Even so, reports about the Talibanisation of Bangladesh continue to appear.

An ominous article appeared in *Time* magazine Asia edition on October 21, 2002, a year after the BNP/Islamic coalition took control of the government. This article was criticised as promoting a sensationalised, westernised view of Bangladesh, but it was confirmed by several Bangladeshi friends. One friend predicted, in October 2001 when the USA attacked Afghanistan that, "when the bombing started, the dregs of al-Qaeda would find their way to Bangladesh, and be met with open arms by the fundamentalists" who had just won the election. Alex Perry's *Time* article, written from Chittagong, confirms the fears expressed by my Bangladeshi friend a year earlier,

The arrival of a large al-Qaeda group in the capital Dhaka raises pressing concerns that Bangladesh may have become a dangerous new front in America's war on terror. Indeed, one Bangladeshi newspaper last month even quoted an unnamed foreign embassy in Dhaka as saying Osama bin Laden's No. 2, Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri, had been hiding out in the country for months after arriving in Chittagong. Today, southern Bangladesh has become a haven for hundreds of jihadis on the lam. They find natural allies in Muslim guerrillas from India hiding out across the border.

In 1999, a retired Bangladeshi ambassador told me that since the days of the military rulers, the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI, has been operating unobstructed in Bangladesh. He said they poured funds into the BNP election campaign in 1992 and one would assume in 2001 as well. Many commentators have explained that the election results, in which the fundamentalist parties won an unprecedented percentage of the votes, was successful because of the propaganda generated in response to the war on terror; "Islam is in danger". An article in *Time*, published just after the election, explained,

At gatherings during the campaign, Jamaat leaders spoke of breathing the 'Islamic spirit of jihad' into the armed forces while supporters rallied around posters of bin Laden and the HUJI slogan: AMRA SOBAI HOBO TALIBAN, BANGLA HOBAFGHANISTAN. We will all be Taliban and Bangladesh will be Afghanistan.'

With these reports, it is not too difficult to guess how the contents of the textbooks may be altered during the BNP rule, and perhaps even the Constitution. This study of textbooks in Bangladesh has not only shown the fragility and volatility of the historical narrative, but the frightening and destructive process of nation building in that tortured country. Several BNP governmental advisors, with full minister's status, "are renowned al-badar's, or were known to have a torture camp operating at their residences in 1971, or have been arrested for political murder as recently as

within the past year"<sup>132</sup>. Quite disturbing, in a world where the air waves are full of calls for international jihad from Osama bin Laden and colleagues.

### **Hindus and the 'Pollution of the Political Air'**

The treatment of the Bangladesh War of Independence is a succinct example of the production of knowledge based on diverging points of view. Bangladesh came into being with the help of Indira Gandhi's international diplomatic efforts, the important contribution of the government in exile in West Bengal, the indisputable aid of the Indian Army. Bangladeshi textbooks have downplayed India's support. Bengalis, both the guerrilla forces, and the civilians were indeed very heroic, but the civil war was cut dramatically short with the help of India.

Without the funds, training and diplomatic efforts of India, the Muktiyuddha, or guerrilla forces could never have ousted 93,000 Pakistani troops in nine short months. India's contribution is an incontestable fact. The war had gone on with hit and run tactics for nine months. Bangladeshi regiments were armed and trained in India. It is indisputable.

When Pakistan bombed Indian airbases in an attempt to preempt India's involvement, Indira Gandhi declared war on Pakistan and immediately recognized Bangladesh, whose government in exile welcome the liberators. From that moment on, it took only eleven days for the Indian Army to march across East Pakistan into Dhaka. The Muktiyuddha accompanied them, victoriously, it was a joint effort, not an

invasion. But without the advance of the Indian forces that cut across the country in those now famous eleven days<sup>133</sup>, the war would have gone on much longer with far more death and suffering. The generals of the Pakistani Army surrendered to the Indian Army, along with "the joint forces", but in Bangladeshi history, India's role is seen as insignificant.

Pakistani textbooks blame Hindu-India for the breakup of the country, ignoring the rise of Bengali nationalism, the manipulation of the elections, and the military crackdown, which led to the civil war. Pakistani textbooks describe India's involvement as calculated aggression.<sup>134</sup> They particularly blame the Hindu population in the eastern wing of the country for "polluting the political air". According to this way of reasoning, the larger number of Hindus in the eastern wing of the country had negatively influenced the religious beliefs of Bengali Muslims—driving them away from Allah, and hence towards secession. In Indian textbooks, the war is explained as a humanitarian response to millions of refugees who had crossed into West Bengal, and of course the fact that Pakistan bombed their airbases.<sup>135</sup>

In Pakistani textbooks published during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's time, 1971-1976, there was no mention of Bangladesh, though Bhutto officially recognised Bangladesh in 1974. Explaining "Bengalee Nationalism" in the context of the "Two-nation Theory," was challenging because it inherently negated the theory. Indira Gandhi claimed that the creation of Bangladesh had "thrown the Two-Nation Theory in the Bay of Bengal". When a discussion of the split-up Pakistan is finally described in Pakistani textbooks,

twenty years after the birth of Bangladesh, it is explained by saying,

[T]he leadership of East Pakistan has been in the hands of [separatists, who] in collaboration with the Hindu teachers, polluted the political air and spread poisonous propaganda among the young students of East Pakistan.<sup>136</sup>

No Bangladeshi textbook has ever mentioned the influence of "pro-Hindu teachers" Ironically, even though Hindus were singled out by the Pakistan Army and *razakars*, their contributions to the war effort and sacrifice to the nation are not mentioned in Bangladeshi textbooks. I asked several scholars why the textbooks didn't mention the fact that in the Pakistani Military's White Paper, the army had orders to "kill Hindus". I was told each time that "Bangladesh is a secular country and we don't identify people by religion". Nonetheless, the word Hindu is used numerous times in the textbooks, sometimes in a disparaging context, such as their negative influence on certain social customs, but never in relation to their contribution to the war of liberation. It is reasoned that this deliberate oversight, delinking Hindu citizens from the War of Liberation, makes it easier to consider them India spies and deny them their rights in an Islamic republic.

West Pakistanis were told that the large population of Hindus in East Pakistan had corrupted the minds of Bengali Muslims. The soldiers' orders were to "kill Hindus". The Hindu Student Hostel at Dhaka University was the first

building to be attacked by Pakistani tanks on the night of March 25, 1971. But the land that took their lives in the making, has consciously decided to erase that ultimate contribution. In a statement dated November 1, 1971 US Senator Edward Kennedy wrote:

Field reports to the US Government, countless eye-witnesses, journalistic accounts, reports of International agencies such as the World Bank and additional information available to the subcommittee document the reign of terror which grips East Bengal (East Pakistan). Hardest hit have been members of the Hindu community who have been robbed of their lands and shops, systematically slaughtered, and in some cases, painted with yellow patches marked 'H'. All of this has been officially sanctioned, ordered and implemented under martial law from Islamabad.<sup>137</sup>

The mandate of the Pakistani Army was to "kill Hindus". The collaborators within East Pakistan, such as the *razakars* and *al-badars*, helped to locate Hindu homes and businesses, marking them with a yellow H,<sup>138</sup> because of this the genocide was highly communal and horribly bloody. Within a few months, ten million refugees, mostly Hindus, were in camps in India. The anti-Hindu mission of the Pakistani Army can be verified by numerous sources and easily obtainable data. It is so widely documented that it does not need to be argued here. Though this fact is obscured in Bangladeshi textbooks, there were stories that

I was told while in Bangladesh that corroborate this information, and deserve to be repeated.

A professor in the History Department at Dhaka University told me about his experiences during the months after the Pakistani Army took control of the country. When the bloodbath began in March, he and his family, along with many other Dhaka professionals fled to their ancestral villages hoping to escape the violence. For a few months, during the monsoon, the Pakistani junta declared an amnesty of sorts and made announcements asking scholars and professionals to return to Dhaka—to their posts in classrooms and hospitals. Promises were made that they would not be arrested. There had been a definite lull in the violence during the summer and many people decided to return to their jobs.

This professor, with whom I spoke with a length, told me that in April he and his family had gone to the home of his wife's relatives in a village in the northern part of the country. Since many professors had been targeted during the early weeks of the crackdown, there had been a mass exodus from the university campuses, which were seen as hot beds of secessionists. In July of 1971, with promises of security, many returned to their homes on the campus of Dhaka University.

While on a barge, crossing a river on their way back to Dhaka my friend and his family encountered several Pakistani soldiers. Since the professor spoke Urdu they struck up a conversation. The professor was initially worried that he might be arrested or killed, but soon the soldiers waylaid their fears because, as they explained to the

professor and his family, they had been "sent to kill Hindus". The professor and his family were Muslim.

The soldiers complained that "for the past few months they had not been able to find many Hindus". He confided to the professor that he felt frustrated that "the Pakistani government had sent them to East Pakistan to kill Hindus" but he found mostly Muslims. He added that he "didn't mind killing Hindus but killing Muslims was against [his] religious beliefs". Needless to say, the professor was relieved, if horrified by the implications.

Unfortunately, a low-grade persecution of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh has seldom abated since 1971. Their properties have been confiscated and not returned, regardless of endless law cases. They are discriminated against in government service, denied military service because they are seen as "Hindu traitors", and their temples and shrines are regularly vandalised.

I interviewed numerous Hindus in Dhaka and Mymensingh who told me stories of how their lives were continually in danger. Controversial as it may be, they also told me that their daughters are often kidnapped, "forcibly converted and married to Muslim boys". They explained that, "once converted, even by force", there is nothing they can do, because "if the girls want to come home" and return to their ancestral religion they are then "accused of apostasy" and run the risk of being murdered by the decree of a fatwa. Because of these pressures, the Hindu population of Bangladesh continues to shrink annually. "Afsan Chowdhury, a historian and social activist, describes low

intensity violence against religious and ethnic minorities as [a] silent disaster." <sup>139</sup>

A.H. Jaffor Ullah explained this process,

For the last few years we have read the news of street agitation in which Islamists marched with the banner to propound a Sharia-based constitution. In the last quarter century, Bangladesh indeed had almost given up the secular spirit that was associated with our freedom struggle of 1971. In its place the powerful politicians have resurrected a defunct concept of nationalism that is solidly anchored to a virulent form of anti-India feelings. This new nationalism that is referred to as Bangladeshi-ism is at best an insular view that tries to play on the cheap sentiment of people often citing pan-Islamism as the main inspiration of this movement. <sup>140</sup>

This observation mirrors critiques of Pakistani textbooks where anti-Indianness forms the basis of the narratives. "Bangladeshi-ism" and the "Ideology of Pakistan" have the same source and intention. Najum Mushtaq, a Pakistani journalist wrote that there are no "other terms" for "Pakistani-Muslim nationalism" except "anti-Indianism". He added, in a June 2001 article, "The 'ideology of Pakistan' as defined to students at every school and college in the country is nothing except anti-Indianism". In Pakistan, the propaganda against Hindu India is pervasive. As Mushtaq wrote, "In every walk of life in Pakistan—from academia to journalism, from sports to bureaucracy—a vast majority

of people have been inculcated with fantastic anti-India notions". Bangladeshi textbooks are more circumspect when discussing Hindus and Hinduism, though one NCTB textbook blamed problems of dowry on "degenerate Hindu influences". However, in Pakistani textbooks, "Phrases like the 'Hindu mentality' and 'devious Indian psyche' are part of the daily military talk".<sup>141</sup>

The textbooks in Bangladesh are not as manically anti-Hindu as in Pakistan. But there is a sense of anti-India sentiment that pervades the country. Bangladeshis perceive that they have to constantly be on guard to resist Indian hegemony—financially, culturally, and militarily. Bangladeshis often asked me if I thought India had any "designs" on their country. Many people in Dhaka told me that in December 1971, after the Pakistani troops surrendered, the Indians were planning to stay in Bangladesh but the Bengalis ran them off. I was asked the same question many times, "Do you think India will try to take over Bangladesh?"<sup>142</sup>

It is that perceived threat of an Indian invasion that is used as the standard justification for the military coup that brought Zia to power. The politics of Zia's party, the BNP, are buoyed by a pervasive anti-Indian rhetoric. When the BNP is in power, fear and loathing towards their neighbour increases. During the last election, the BNP campaigned that the Awami League was too pro-India – Sheikh Hasina would surrender Bangladesh's hard won freedom. Hasina, during the 2001 elections made numerous anti-India comments to prove her loyalties. That she was compelled to do so to attract votes is an indication of the level of anti-

Indian feelings among the people. Notably, the majority of Bangladeshi intellectuals are not anti-Hindu and they don't hate India—most of them go there occasionally for conferences. But, among the common people the feelings of anti-Indianness are increasing.

If this trend continues, soon all Hindus, such as Ram Mohan Roy, Satyajit Ray, and Rabindranath Tagore, may be erased from the story of Bengali culture. If this is allowed to happen, Bangladeshi cultural nationalism will exist no more and the BNP will have succeed in making anti-Indianism the basis of the nation, as it is in Pakistan. Najum Mushtaq wrote, "Anti-Indianism, in short, runs deep in Pakistani state and society. It is a state of mind that cannot be switched off". He adds, "People have no other alternative frame of reference in which to define Pakistani nationalism". Bangladeshi nationalism still has its historical reference points, but they are quickly disappearing.

The population of Hindus in Bangladesh has continued to decline steadily since 1947. According to the *Bangladesh Population Census of 1991, Vol. I, Analytical Report*, the percentage of Hindus in Bangladesh in 1951 was 22%, by 1961 their demographic composition had declined to 19%. Since the traumas inflicted on Bangladesh in 1971 precluded the taking of a census, when it was taken again in 1974, the percentage of Hindus had decreased significantly to 14%. The decline has continued through the decades, with the total percentage decreasing to 12.75% in 1981 and 11% in 1991 and about 9% in 2001. This decline is not due to radically reduced birth rates, but rather to the continuing

exodus of Hindus from Bangladesh due to sporadic persecution.

In Bangladesh, several times when I was introduced to a Hindu Bangladeshi, he or she would be called, "my Indian friend". I asked these people if they were from India. I was told each time that they had never been to India and they were born in Bangladesh as had been their fathers and their fathers' fathers. I asked why they were introduced as "Indian". They explained that "Bangladeshis think all Hindus are Indian". I was told by many non-Hindu Bangladeshis, "that professors and other professionals who are Hindus, work in Bangladesh but send their children to study in India and send their savings to relatives in Calcutta". Several people in Bangladesh complained that, "all the Bangladeshi Hindus plan to retire in West Bengal". "Their children all go to school at Shanti Niketan" the school of Rabindranath Tagore in West Bengal.

The Hindus I spoke with were not secure in their place in Bangladesh, and were often intimidated. This was told to me during the time of Awami League rule, which my Hindu informants explained was far more friendly to the Hindu minority. The BNP is known to be very anti-Hindu, partially because the Hindus tend to vote for the Awami League, since the latter represents a more pan-Bengali nationalism, whereas the BNP represents an Islamic Bengali nationalist orientation.

## A Tale That Can't Be Told

In social studies textbooks in Bangladesh, the official story of the country ends a few weeks after liberation on December 16, with the return of Sheikh Mujib from confinement in Pakistan on January 10, 1972. Naturally, this would be the ending for textbooks written immediately after the creation of the nation. But, there have been no new additions made to the official textbook history of contemporary Bangladesh for over thirty years. Though Zia and Ershad changed some of the details around, their administrations have not been included as part of the continuing story of Bangladeshi history. For the school children of Bangladesh, history stopped in January 1972.

Even in the Civics books, changes made to the Constitution are barely discussed. It is as if the death of Mujib was so horrific that it could not be told in the textbooks, so nothing about Zia's and Ershad's rise to power at the center could be added, without at least mentioning the brutal fact that Bangabandhu et al had been murdered.

Therefore, no continuing political events beyond this point can be considered in NCTB historiography.

Even in the textbooks published during the Awami League's tenure in the late nineties, the murder of Sheikh Mujib is not included. The story of the nation as written in the textbooks, ends as soon as the country comes into existence. This has not changed in thirty-one years of independence. Neither the BNP or the Awami League has been able to write textbooks about the history of Bangladesh after January 10, 1972.

The re-telling of certain events leading to the liberation of the nation are highly contested, they can and have been told and retold in the media, on internet discussion groups, in numerous books written since 1971. There are a wide selection of books about the events post-1971, written from one perspective or another. But for the children of Bangladesh, the events after independence have not been written into their textbooks.

Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman's murder in August 1975 was gruesome. The leader of the country was gunned down in his home in Dhaka, along with most of his family, including his wife, three sons, one of whom was only a child, and two daughters-in-law, one who was pregnant, as well as his secretary and a servant and another group of Awami Leaguers, twenty-one people in all. Two of his daughters were in Europe at the time including Sheikh Hasina.

Writing about this tragic mass murder, not to mention the four Awami leaders who were murdered in a jail cell on November 3, continues to be too controversial for school level textbook writers. Importantly, it was politically

dangerous for the military rulers to include that bit of history—in which they were implicated. Zia and Ershad were willing to forego their own place in the history textbooks in order to avoid discussing the assassination of Mujib. So, the telling of history had to end as the history of the independent nation came into being.

Each and every Bangladeshi scholar with whom I spoke expressed a pride in the long and colourful history of their nation. But there was also a fear of history that pervaded the conversations. The political climate was so charged that the story of the nation could not be written. It could not be agreed upon. Mujib may have been the inspirational figure behind the Bangladesh independence war, but he became degenerate, and needed to be killed—or so it is claimed. How would the BNP write that into a school textbook? In Bangladesh, the historical narrative had been twisted just enough by military dictators to emulate the Pakistani model that denigrates and attacks cultural nationalism in favor of pan-Islamism.

Bangladeshis love their history—pushing ancient Bengali identity on past the pre-Aryan period—tracing the development of Bengali history through numerous great dynasties, Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic. Bangladeshi textbooks are very Bengali-centric, from proto-history to the present. History textbooks in most countries use this ethnocentric approach.

Textbooks published in the early years of Bangladesh, included the richness of the ancient past. They did not eschewed the history of Hindu India or the civilization of the subcontinent. History about other areas besides East

Bengal are usually brief and tangential to the narrative about Bangladesh, but, importantly, it is not ignored, as non-Muslim history is usually ignored in Pakistani textbooks. As mentioned, in Pakistan's textbooks the creation of Bangladesh barely gets mentioned, except in the context of a "Hindu conspiracy".

In Pakistani textbooks, Bangladesh was eventually included—history did not come to an end the moment Pakistan came in to being. Pakistani textbooks continue the tale of the nation, warped and white-washed as it may be, the narrative proceeds from 1947 to the present. Ayub is mentioned, as are both Bhuttos, though the lens through which they are evaluated is not necessarily positive. General Zia-ul Haq is in the textbooks, praised for his efforts to Islamise the nation. Nawaz Sharief is even mentioned, and after May 1998, two paragraphs were added justifying the tests of the nuclear bombs. In the most recent editions, General Musharraf has found a place in the narrative, even the Agra Summit is discussed, where the General is described as a diplomat, whose efforts were scuttled by the Indian government's trickery.

As each leader in Pakistan replaces the next, the story of his or her predecessor is altered slightly, especially if he or she had been arrested, executed, or exiled. With each regime change, the tale of the new leader is inserted, only to be re-distorted when the next election or coup replaces the previous government. In Pakistan, regardless of its interpretation, the history of the nation marches on. Not so in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshis have found it difficult to write the history of their country after the creation of the nation. The fact that history is frozen is doubly strange considering the pride Bangladeshis take in not only the Liberation War, but the vast scope of Bengali history through the millennia. However, controversies about certain historical events make reconstructing them almost impossible. An article by the scholar, M. Rashiduzzaman, *Bangladesh: In Search of a New Historical Envisioning*<sup>143</sup>, helps to explain this problem,

The post-independent Bangladesh history has been largely anecdotal and memory-based, which is a popular, yet a faulty, mode of historical writing. There is always a void between memory-driven popular construction of the past and historiographical evaluation of the yore, and it is risky to make a compelling historical judgment primarily based on memories and personal anecdotes that could be tainted and manipulated.

The fact that many of the freedom fighters are still living makes the collection of data about the independence war a rich experience. Afsan Chowdhury, a well-known writer and historian from Dhaka, collected stories from Bangladeshis who had contributed to the war effort or who were victimised by it. But the television station he worked for Ekushy was shut down when the BNP came back to power in 2001. In the first few years of the nation, there was an effort to preserve the memory of the war effort. But, according to many scholars, after the generals came to

power there was a concerted effort to destroy all the records of the people's struggle during the War of Liberation.<sup>144</sup> This seems like a far fetched accusation, since both parties are fixated on the liberation war, and extract their validation from the images associated. However, the generals sought to take the cultural aspect out of the nationalism, and replace this with religious conservatism.

### **Whither Contemporary History in Bangladeshi Textbooks?**

The Social Studies textbooks published by the NCTB in Bangladesh in 1998, which were the first editions that also had English translations, were in general non-communal in tone, except for a few references to "degenerate Hindu influences." The NCTB textbooks, though fairly uninformative, as are most textbooks, are up to date regarding the rest of the world, including such details as the Gulf War in 1990 and the situation in Bosnia in 1995.

Though there are textbooks which include ancient histories of Rome, Egypt, and other general historical information, the majority of the pages in the social studies textbooks are dedicated to the development of Bengali nationalism and the emergence of Bangladesh. In textbooks published in 1997-98, descriptions of the struggle for autonomy from Pakistani dominance explain the exploitation, the political treachery, the valiant and bloody War of Liberation, the creation of the nation. At which point the narrative ends.

Nationalism was achieved. The Bengali nation came into being with the blood of millions of martyrs, and the rape of 300,000 innocent women and girls. These heroes and heroines gave their lives and were subjected to terror and torture so that they and their fellow Bengalis could have among other rights, the freedom to tell the history of their nation in their own terms. Yet, once independence was achieved, the contemporary history of their nation ceased to be written.

Textbooks designed for Bangladeshi students delve into the distant past and speak of the lasting influences of Buddhism on the Bengali psyche, discuss the dynamic and relevant contributions of such Hindu greats as Ram Mohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore. By winning the War of Liberation, they not only saved their country from a narrow view of history based on the Two Nation Theory—which erased five thousand years of the subcontinent's past—but they recaptured it from the communal forces, so that they could describe a proud past that stretches back into distant millennia and includes heroes of various religions.

Ironically, after the success of such a heroic effort, the curriculum committees were unable to continue writing the modern history of their country. They eagerly rewrote the story of the ancient period, rescuing it from the short sighted perspective of Pakistani textbooks editors. They detailed the events that characterised the past, glorifying the growth of Bengali nationalism. They revelled in the stories of resistance to Pakistani autocracy and the drive for freedom and democracy ... the "inevitability of Bangladesh" ... but, at that point, the story ends, at least in

the textbooks. Even the military rulers, though they tried to manipulate the narrative, had to let the story of bravery and exploitation tell itself, but only up until January 1972.

In Bangladesh, the rest of the world continues to have a history—the Soviet Union collapses, Blacks gain the right to vote in South Africa—all these are mentioned in contemporary Bangladeshi textbooks. Yet, there is no discussion of the assassinations of Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman or General Zia. In the textbooks, there is nothing about the popular movement to end the military rule and the restoration of democracy in 1991. The Gulf War and the Balkans are discussed ... but in Bangladeshi textbooks, contemporary history of the nation ended as soon as the state came into being.

The Secondary Civics textbook published in 1998 mentioned the fifth amendment which created a presidential form of government and had one sentence about the Indemnity Ordinance, that pardoned the assassins of Sheikh Mujib, which was described as a “disgrace”. At any rate, that particular update to the Civics textbook was extracted in 2001. History textbooks only describe the events leading up to the creation of Bangladesh—and that is narrated differently every six years. Though the history of the rest of the world continues, Bangladeshi NCTB historiography-by-committee ignores the events in independent Bangladesh. A crystallized example of this fear of history is the difficulty faced when narrating the story of November 7, 1975.<sup>145</sup>

How would an objective historian recount the events leading from August 15 to November 7, and its

consequences? Perhaps two columns, where the opposing points of view could juxtapose the divergent perspectives and empower the students to analyze, instead of simply memorize. Must history be a sanitised consensus, that changes when the political party at the center changes, or is it in fact, a "furious debate informed by evidence and reason."<sup>146</sup>

In Bangladeshi textbooks, it is ironic that Saddam Hussain's name appears, but not Colonel Taher, a great hero of the War of Independence. Taher fell out with Mujib and was later hung by Zia, so neither of the polarised groups claim him. Nelson Mandela's name appears once, as does the name of Tajuddin Ahmed.

Tajuddin Ahmed's place in history has been excluded from most Bangladeshi treatments. He was the Awami Leaguer who led the government in exile from Mujibagar, established near Calcutta. Tajuddin Ahmed and Mujib disagreed over the creation of Baksal, a one-party state. He was forced to resign his post as minister in the government in 1974.

Tajuddin Ahmed was one of the most important actors leading to the creation of Bangladesh. He was the 'acting' prime minister in the government in exile, while the war was raging in his country and Sheikh Mujib was in prison in the western wing. Tajuddin's strained relationship with Mujib was brought about in part, by intrigues orchestrated by General Khandaker Mushtaq Ahmed, whose name, as Mascarenhas wrote, has become synonymous "with treachery".

Of all the actors in the Bangladeshi drama, Tajuddin's determination to be true to the vision of the liberation movement is unparalleled. Yet, he is ignored in history. Tajuddin's ideas for a pluralistic democratic Bangladesh were betrayed by his friend and mentor Sheikh Mujib. He was politically sidelined in the early years, as his country crashed headfirst in to constitutional chaos.

Tajuddin was murdered by the order of a scheming colleague Khandaker Mushtaq Ahmed, who had made himself president after Mujib's assassination. The murder of Tajuddin was preplanned. Khandaker Mushtaq then promulgated the original Indemnity Ordinance to exonerate those who had killed Mujib. Indemnity was also given to the military men who had stormed the jail that night in November 1975, and murdered Tajuddin along with three other prominent Awami League leaders. The Indemnity Ordinance was institutionalized into the constitution by General Zia. All these things have not made it into the textbooks.

Tajuddin Ahmed was one of the main players in the War of Liberation. He was also the most honest of many of those players. In 1998, he was posthumously awarded the long overdue respect denied to him. This "rehabilitation" that was accorded to him when the Awami League was in power, has certainly been withdrawn by the BNP. Army personnel brutally murdered him to ensure that no civilians capable of leading the nation remained alive. The military wanted to keep the power. It was therefore essential to murder all democratic statesmen.

March 25 is Independence Day, a holiday in Bangladesh that marks the day that the War of Liberation began. On that date in 1999, on the front page of the *Daily Star*, was an article, "Tajuddin is being honored but ...". It described the fallout between Mujib and Tajuddin over the creation of the one-party system and his resignation.

On at least two occasions in October 1974, the Bangabandhu tried, unsuccessfully to convince Tajuddin whose argument lay in his belief that the one-party system and the centralization of powers in one hand were going to do more harm than good to the nation.

The front-page article reproduces his "forced" letter of resignation and states, "History is full of ironies". The author explains,

A quarter of a century [after falling out of favor with Sheikh Mujib] he is being eulogized and rehabilitated as one of the national heroes alongside the person who had shown him the door

The staff reporter at the *Daily Star* asked an important question,

Now that the man, who carried forward the tasks of the founding father in his absence during those nine months in 1971, is being remembered with respect, we see reasons to raise at least one question. The nation

had long neglected the founding father but came back to recover from the nonchalance. Why not the other person, who in the absence of the Bangabandhu held everything together? Tajuddin, who led the Liberation War as the head of the helpless government in exile to victory, should now be given his due.

How long will it be before Tajuddin finds his permanent place in Bangladeshi history? There are numerous non-communal, academically rigorous, and objective scholars and historians in Bangladesh who could write about the events of 1972-2003. Among most intellectuals I interviewed there was a fear to face the past and others who unfortunately feel straitjacketed by contemporary political pressures. If new chapters had been added by the Awami League in 1997, which they weren't, they would have been expunged or radically revised by the BNP in 2001. But neither camp can write chronologically about the post-independence past.

My informant at the NCTB responded to this criticism,

The observation made in this point is absolutely pertinent. As time and tide wait for none, so the history of Bangladesh cannot come to a halt with achievement of independence. Scantily reverses to or treatment in brevity of the historical event of post independence Bangladesh do not give a clear and vivid picture, rather tend to create confusion and misconception. There may be controversy and differences of opinion on issues like assassination of Mujib, Zia, and advent

and exit of Ershad. But historical analysis and evaluation will elicit the truth and determine their respective place in the annals. This issue was raised on different occasions and hopefully will be settled in the next cycle ... the murder of Bangabandhu, Zia, and [other] leaders is a potent factor in this matter.

In 1999, when I made this observation at a lecture in Dhaka, about the lack of post-1971 history in the textbooks, it did seem that the time had arrived to add a few more chapters. Members of the audience commented that the nation had come into being against all odds—it's continuing story "should be told to the school children". The discussion revolved around the purpose of education. Several people insisted that the youth must be told about the past so they could form their own informed ideas. They argued that students must be given adequate information to help them make choices and decisions that would hopefully provide Bangladesh with intelligent citizens for the future.

The history of Bangladesh certainly did not stop in January 1972, only the narrative came to an end. Now, with the reelection of the BNP, as also with the rewriting of Bangladeshi history during the recent Awami League period, the story continues to be stunted, unable to coalesce and progress past the death of Mujib, the disputed father of the nation.

### **Bangladeshi Identity and Textbooks**

In Bangladesh, as in all nations, an attitude of certainty regarding the efficacy of education is easily observable. In

Dhaka in 1999, there were often articles in the newspapers, such as the May 3 edition of *The Bangladesh Observer*, Sheikh Hasina is quoted, "Our aim is to rear children as worthy citizens so that they can love the country and culture and get equipped with modern education." From *The Daily Star*, March 19, of that year, under the heading "Govt taking all steps to groom children as worthy citizens," the article begins, "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government is working to groom the country's children as golden sons to build a ... Golden Bengal..." She told the young students at Tungipara, the native town of her father, "We want to groom you as golden sons of the soil. With you, we'll build a 'Sonar Bangla'."<sup>147</sup>

The first effort at educational reform in Bangladesh, the National Education Commission, popularly known as the Qudrat-e-Khuda Committee, was initiated a mere six months after the independence of the country, such was the confidence in the fruits of educational mandates. Its report, published in May, 1974, stated that the

aim was to remove the various defects and deficiencies of our present education system, to indicate a way as to how a wholesome nationhood can be achieved through the medium of education and to strengthen the country in modern knowledge.

In the first chapter of the Qudrat-e-Khuda report, education is called "a weapon for social transformation [and a] medium for the reconstruction of our individual and social lives, [a means to] destroy prejudices,

malpractices, and corruption." The report asserts that "educational institutions must assume a meaningful role in building the character of their pupils and in generating a sense of values".

Regardless of these good intentions, there are plenty of colonial paradigms lingering in textbooks in Bangladesh. In the ninth/tenth class Social Studies textbook published in 1997 by the NCTB, the first chapter, devoted to the study of Sociology, "Society, Culture and Civilization," was simultaneously over-simplistic, uninformative, and overloaded with disconnected facts. The textbook repeatedly quotes various sociologists and other scholars without any reference to the period or pros or cons of the theories of the scholars cited.

Invariably, the social scientists appropriated to lend academic validity to the textbook's arguments are European or American. Strings of official quotes from western scholars are liberally peppered throughout the textbook. For example, in only two short paragraphs on the initial page of the Sociology section, seven sociologists are quoted with bare mention of their ideas or orientations. Beginning with, "According to the opinion of L.F. Ward and Graham Samner, 'Sociology is the science of social phenomenon'." Followed immediately by the sentence, "French sociologist Emile Durkheim says that sociology is the science of social institutions". And yet another quote in this string, "In the opinion of German sociologist Max Weber, sociology is the study of social actions".

The paragraph ends with the sentence, "According to MacIver and Page, sociology is the only science which

studies about social relationship of man and society". MacIver is quoted in four more places on the next three pages, but the text never mentions who he was and why students should remember what he had to say. Ultimately, where is the justification that a 14-year-old Bangladeshi child needs to know this splattering of names of sociologists without adequate context of their social positioning? A detailed explanation of basic sociological concepts would be far more valuable than the staccato out-spewing of names of famous and not-so-famous Euro-American sociologists.

This name dropping continues throughout. For example, on page three under the heading "What is Culture?" after a few sentences explaining "aspects of human life," the textbook informs that, "E.B. Taylor says, 'culture is man's learned knowledge'," immediately followed by, "According to North ...". A few pages later, "sociologist Kingley Davis" is quoted and we are told what "Ogburn and Nimkoff" had to say. The question remains, who are Taylor and North, Ogburn and Nimkoff? And why should these young students care? How does this string of Western names improve their understanding of the workings of society?

Students at a high school in Dhaka complained that they had to memorise these names without any context, which they promptly forgot after the test. They still weren't sure just what sociology was ... "it was too confusing ... who are all those people?" One student lamented that she had points taken off because she "accidentally spelled Nimkoff as Nibkoff", but she had no understanding about the core theories of sociology.

Two of the most blatant misuses of long-floated theories of social scientists of the colonial era can be found on page 14 of this NCTB Sociology textbook, under the heading "Geographical Factors". Here, the "French criminologist Lambroso" (sic) is quoted as saying "that crime occurs due to geographical factor." (sic) The quote continues, "injury and murder occur more in hilly areas than the plain lands." No other explanation is given.

Since in Bangladesh there is a sharp cultural and linguistic distinction between the hill tracts and the rest of the country, this type of simplistic analysis, brought forth with quotes from a "French criminologist" might cause the children of this nation to develop ideas which could be less than constructive to their society. Besides encouraging a prejudicial rupture in the nation, the reference is incorrect. Cesare Lombroso, not Lambroso, was an Italian criminologist, not French, who argued that criminals had certain recognisable hereditary physical traits. Lombroso's theory was disproved in the early twentieth century. It was, rather, Montesquieu who attempted to relate criminal behaviour to natural, or physical, environment. It is interesting to note, that in Bangladesh there is more crime per capita in the plains than the hills. But the masses of Bangladeshi school children are indoctrinated with outdated, destructive, and racist theories.

The textbook cites another of Montesquieu's now discredited theories. This pseudo-fact is by far the most potentially damaging misuse of displaced Western theories found in this textbook. "According to Montesque (sic) cold climate is favourable to independence and tropical climate

is favourable for slavery and despotism." There is absolutely no reason that the school children of Bangladesh, without a critical discussion in the text, should be taught this now highly discredited theory formulated in the mid-eighteenth century. How will such statements serve their needs in a democratic nation?

Added to this preposterous use of questionable theories of environmental determinism propagated in the eighteenth century, is the next statement in the textbook which teaches the youth of Bangladesh that they are inherently lazy and indolent.

According to Huntington, mental skill and intelligence are the highest at temperature under 40°F. [sic] The people of the cold countries are hard-working while the people of tropical areas are of idle nature.

Ironically, probably because of a typographical error, the textbook incorrectly states the supposed temperature for maximum intelligence to be 40°F instead of 40°C, making it seem that only those living near the polar regions can lay claim to superior intelligence. However, Ellsworth Huntington's work, though popular at the turn of the century, especially among colonialists and racists advocating European racial and social dominance, made claims for the superiority of people living in temperate, cooler zones in comparison to those living in the warmer tropics. His work is now seen as ethnocentric and of doubtful scientific validity.

Nonetheless, how would a Bangladeshi adolescent answer the essay question at the end of this chapter,

"Discuss the influence of geographical factors on social life"? If he or she were to argue against the text, would points be lost for disagreeing with what was printed in the textbook? Students are simply required to internalise these self-negating perspectives in order to parrot the text and pass the test. Page 19 of this thus-far-dubious textbook states, "Every society through its education system teaches it members to play their specific roles so that the members can learn their social values, norms, and habits." But if these lessons serve to reify class inequities and negate democratic ideals, then the purpose and result of the educational system must be questioned.

## The Battle of the Begums<sup>148</sup>

**T**he current prime minister, Khaleda Zia, and the former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina are both certified patriotic Bangladeshi begums. These two ladies are in a locked battle, contesting the nation from opposite sides. Their agendas and their styles are very different.

During her time as prime minister, Hasina was able to sign a treaty with the Chakma Hill tribes to end the 20 year old insurgency<sup>149</sup>. She signed the Ganges Water Treaty with India, that had languished unresolved for decades. She passed a law that partially gave Hindus the right to reclaim properties, which had been illegally confiscated from them in 1947, 1965, and 1971, during periods of pogroms against that community. Discriminatory laws had been codified in the Hindus Vested and Non-resident Property Act. The Awami League made somewhat of an effort to do away with this controversial law just at the end of their term in office. This discriminatory law was finally repealed after generations of Bangladeshi Hindus had unsuccessfully advocated for their right to claim their own property.<sup>150</sup>

Unfortunately, soon after the repeal of the Vested Properties Act, the BNP returned to power and the ordinance is now in the courts. Because of these various treaties and ordinances, the Awami League is seen as pro-Hindu.<sup>151</sup>

When I was in Dhaka while the Awami League was in power, one of the Cabinet ministers was a Hindu. Every time Mr. Sen stood to speak in Parliament, the members of the BNP walked out in protest—not because they disagreed with what he was saying, which they probably did, but they walked out simply because he is a Hindu. Not to defend the BJP, but in India, it is inconceivable that all the members of the BJP would stand in unison and leave the Lok Sabha when a Muslim MP stood up to speak. Perhaps, if Murli Manohar Joshi stood to speak, the members of the CPI-M (Communist Party of India-Marxist) might walk out in protest over some issue. But in Bangladesh there is a lot of walking out in unison. Resigning in mass keeps the government in disarray and at a perpetual standstill.

For the term that the Awami League was in power 1996-2001, the country was victimised by another six years of *hartals* and street violence staged by Madame Zia and BNP goons who burned rickshawwallas and threatened citizens with bamboo poles and other more lethal weapons. *Hartals*<sup>152</sup> are the bane of Bangladesh, where they have appropriated Mahatma Gandhi's model but forsaken his methodology and philosophy.

*Hartals* are based on ahimsa, nonviolence—passive resistance. But in Bangladesh, all activity ceases during a hartal—because they are enforced by extreme violence. Students can't go to school because buses and cars can't

run, if they do they are set on fire.... passengers and all. Professors and state workers still draw a salary sitting at home watching TV or catching up on their reading. However, the vast majority of Bangladeshis who make their living with a trade or in commerce lose thousands of dollars, millions of *takas* every year. If they open their stores, they are burned down or looted by *hartal* enforcers roaming the streets. If a taxi driver is caught, his car will be torched and he will be lucky if he is not killed. Hartals cost Bangladesh *tens of billions* of dollars each year. There are statistics available on this tragic loss of prosperity and life that has been caused by these two warring women during the past twelve years. <sup>153</sup>

Just as many social events are becoming more conservative, and *fatwas* often issued against people singing Rabindra Sangit, so Islamic customs and fashions now seem to dominate in political elections and public posturing. Sheikh Hasina wears a kind of hijab head gear, and is often photographed offering prayers. She has taken up the outward symbols of Islam to appeal to the masses. I was told by one of her old associates, she is personally religious and keeps the fast during Ramzan and says her prayers, but it was a private thing not showy. Never until the recent years did she outwardly display her religious identity in such an obviously conservative fashion. Yet, though she looks and dresses more Islamic than Mrs. Zia, she is considered more secular than Khaleda, who certainly does not wear Islamic headgear.

To offer a personal observation, I would like to point out the irony of photos of Khaleda Zia, sitting at a

conference table with Golam Azam or some other Mullahas—looking very much out of place, fashion wise. She wears her hair in a bouffant style that was popular in the sixties and wears lots of make up, especially a certain iridescent lipstick that hasn't been in vogue since the seventies. She usually wears a rather diaphanous chiffon sari, with a very skimpy choli blouse, cut to reveal her cleavage under the nearly transparent silk.

Silk saris are the most beautiful fashion of the sub-continent. Who doesn't admire shimmering saris and a sexy choli? But somehow, in photos of Mrs. Zia dressed in this attire, she seems strangely misplaced among the Jamaat. I told several BNP supporters whom I met to advise her to dispense with the super-gloss lipstick and get to a hair dresser who could give her a more contemporary look. They didn't seem amused, they call her *pupal*, which means doll, because she is known to have been a good looking woman in her youth. When I mentioned my critique to my Awami League friends, they were highly amused by my complaint about the fashion preferences of the main opposition candidate. They said she was stuck in the seventies in more ways than one. They also complained that her level of education, with a high school degree, was not on par with the needs of international diplomacy.

If politics in Bangladesh weren't such a life and death situation, with the future of freedom and human rights threatened, it would seem like a soap opera or sitcom. But the issues are dead serious and the stakes are high indeed, regardless of the inconsistency or the appearance of the two female protagonists. The nation hangs in balance

between a quasi-secularist who wears the garb of a conservative Muslim Begum and a pseudo-fundamentalist who dresses like an aging Mumbai movie star.<sup>154</sup>

### Student Politics

Bangladesh would not exist today if it were not for its students. Students of the colleges and universities in Bangladesh led the language movement. They were the first ones to die. They led the agitations that demanded more autonomy culminating with the independence war. As part of the Muktiyuddho, they marched and fought alongside adults, never missing a step, in fact, leading and inspiring the troops. They were visionaries, opposing oppression. Student movements are a great tradition in Bangladesh. Muntissir Mamoon wrote that, "The students... had immense influence on the common people". In the sixties,

Their influence had risen to such a level that during hartals if the students had said that birds would not fly, then the birds would listen to that.<sup>155</sup>

The universities in Bangladesh have always been highly politicised, at least since 1948 when Jinnah announced the Urdu only policy. Today, however, it is now a visionless form of politics. For the past few decades in Bangladesh, universities are often closed and classes cancelled—graduation can be delayed for several semesters, even years. The climate on campuses is overly politicised and because of the involvement of adults from the opposing political

parties, the many demonstrations and marches often turn violent.

When I was in Bangladesh in 1998-99, the president of the country, Justice Shahbuddin Ahmed often made speeches about the negative impact of politics on campuses. I saw several demonstrations when I was visiting the campus of Dhaka University, often it was closed down when I had anticipated going there to meet a professor. There were murderous encounters between rival political groups. These altercations had no meaning, did not teach about struggle against tyranny, they only caused death and delay.

In an article in the *Daily Star* on August 26, 2002, titled, *Frustration over campus violence*, the journalist wrote about "Speakers at a discussion [who] expressed their grave concern over the atmosphere at the education institutions of the country, which they felt have reached its rock bottom." The article continued,

The speakers condemned the recent police attack on the students of Shamsunnahar Hall and the assault of teachers. They expressed their frustration over the unbridled campus violence that continues to claim the lives of general students.

The correspondent lamented that,

Ironically, a certain quarter of policy makers and politicians seem indifferent about the frequent closure of universities or other campus problems, since their children or wards do not attend any of the public universities.

The article continues,

The speakers said that in most cases the teachers, who are supposed to have the sovereign power of an education institution, are sidelined by politicians or by the people they patronise. 'As long as politics continues to control the institutions, there would not be any real autonomy or any improvement in the educational atmosphere,' said Abdullah Abu Sayeed.

Most of the speakers, however, rejected the idea of banning student politics mentioning the glorious past of student politics in the country. 'A student must have political awareness,' said Mosharraf Hossain. 'He can be a good student but never a good citizen unless he is politically conscious,' he clarified.

However the participants

grumbled that some people are using student politics or the education institution as a source of earning. These individuals use campus as a platform for future gain and they should not be called students. [...] Teachers should also cut off its link from political parties, some of the speakers noted.

*Alochona Magazine*<sup>156</sup> ran a story by a student Haroon Rashid, titled *Politics Watch: Banning Student Politic*. Rashid wrote, that in the past "many talented politicians emerged from the student politics". However, he continued "the situation is very different now. If we expect that

environment at this time, we are living in fool's paradise". He gave a good example, comparing Kashmir with the violence on campuses,

Once Kashmir was a dream place for the tourists, can anybody think of traveling there now? Yes, adventurous person may dare to travel there. But our parents do not send their kids to the college or universities for an adventure.

The article ends with this query,

Who is dominating in the student wings of all the universities now? Please ask any student of any major universities. How many of them are students? How many non-students stay in the university halls? Who supplies arms to them? Why they have to capture university halls? Anybody has an answer of this entire question where there is a link with education?

When I was in Dhaka there was plenty of violence on campus and BNP students often attacked the dormitories of Awami League students and vice-a-versa. Sometimes all their possessions were looted and there were even deaths. Most of these attacks were orchestrated by persons off campus.

There is no longer the fervent love of freedom that brought activism on the campuses during the fifties and sixties and during the move to remove Ershad in the late eighties. Now there are only politicised tussles and the threats of violence that disrupt the education of Bangladeshi

students. The burning issues of culture and democracy that once fired up the imagination of the Bengali students has degenerated in a meaningless cycle of violence and cancelled classes. The confusing history they were taught in their revolving textbooks has given them no basis on which to form their understanding of their nation... so they continue to fight it out, as do the politicians.

The preceding chapter on the politics of history in Bangladesh shows the volatile nature of the historical narrative. The subtleties of the changes that brought about the battles over history in Bangladesh are dwarfed in comparison to the rancour those changes cause. The ongoing alterations in the textbooks at this point in time in Bangladesh seem to be made without any accountability—by decree, democratic as it may be. The following chapter on “the Rewriting of History in India” reveals a very public process that has, due to the nature of Indian intellectuals, been internationalised. The new textbooks and other controversial issues will be discussed, particularly the deep divisions between Indian scholars.

As in Bangladesh, much of the outcry about additions or extractions of details from the historical narrative in India are really dealing with minutiae, and the reactionary responses are in excess. But, one thing is constant among the three nations considered in this study, asking a group to alter their perceptions of the past is like asking them to give up their bonds to their families. Historiography as a process of historical inquiry is not so much in question as is the strident attachment to historiography as an ideology.

# Press Articles

## *Local/ District News*

### **Student bodies control Ctg colleges**

NAZIMUDDIN SHYAMOL, CHITTAGONG

July 10: Most of the colleges of the port city Chittagong are under the control of student organisations, especially the students wing of the BNP Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the Islami Chhatra Shibir of the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) of the Awami League for the last two decades.

The most prominent educational institute of the port city, the Chittagong Government College, which was established in 1869, was brought under the control of Shibir on 1983, after the killing of Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU) leader Shadat Hossain.

The BCU leaders alleged that the cadres of Shibir killed Shadat Hossain on May 1983 and resorted to terrorism to

occupy the college campus. The Shibir cadres gained control of the college which is still continuing.

Shibir also occupied the ancient college of the port city, Hazi Mohammed Mohsin Government College, which was established in 1863.

After gaining control of these colleges they banned the activities of the other students organisations. They stopped all cultural activities on these campuses. They also occupied the Nizampur College, the Sitakundo College and the Fatikchhari College. The Shibir leaders are allegedly involved in collecting toll, snatching and other criminal activities on the occupied campuses and surrounding areas.

One Shibir cadre was killed and three others were injured in mass beating at Chandmia Munshi Lane under Bakalia thana on June 13. According to police sources, eight Shibir cadres, including Jamaluddin, Hashem, Jasimuddin and Nizamuddin, went to Chandmia Munshi lane near Chawk Bazaar at about 9 am on June 13 and demanded toll of Tk 10,000 from a shopkeeper Musaddek. But the shopkeeper refused to give the toll leading to altercation between the toll collectors and the shopkeepers. A Shibir activist stabbed the shopkeeper. Local residents rushed in and started beating the Shibir cadres resulting in the death of one Jamaluddin (24) on the spot. Three others were injured while four managed to escape. The Shibir cadres are reported to be the members of the Tauhid group of the Chittagong College.

Sources said that the students wing of the BNP gained control of the Chittagong Medical College, the Pahartoli College, the Chittagong Polytechnic Institute, the Fateyabad

College, the Bakolia Shahid Smriti College, the Mirerswrai College, the Barrierhat College and the Hathazari College. Now they are trying to bring the other colleges of Chittagong under control.

The BNP-backed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) again tried to occupy the Chittagong Government Commerce College with the help of police on July 5.

The sources said that a group of JCD cadres numbering 20 or 25 led by the leaders of the JCD city unit went to the campus at around 11 am and took out a procession on the campus.

At that time a team of the Double Mooring thana police was present there. The leaders of the Bangladesh Chhatra League of Commerce College unit alleged that the police beat the activists of the BCL and general students of the college. But the Double Mooring thana denied the allegation of the BCL. The duty officer of the thana told The Independent that the activists of the Chhatra Dal organised a procession on the campus. With tension mounting there, the police rushed to the spot. Chase and counter-chase by the JCD and the BCL were going on at that time.

It may be mentioned that the JCD tried to occupy several times the Commerce College campus since July 1. Earlier, the central president and general secretary of the JCD along with the leaders and activists of the Chittagong city unit went to the Chittagong College, the Mohsin College, the City College and Commerce College and staged a showdown on the campuses.

The sources said, the student wing of the Awami League BCL gained control of the Government City College, the

Chittagong Commerce College, the MES Omargani College, the Islamia College, the Sultan Ahmed Chowdhury College, the Law College, the Laila Kabir College and the Patia College.

The leaders of the BCL are also allegedly involved in collecting tolls, snatching and other criminal activities on the occupied campuses and surrounding areas. The leaders of the BCL do this in association with the college administration in the City College and the Commerce College, it is alleged.

The JCD leaders are also allegedly involved in collecting toll in the Chittagong Medical College and the Pahartoli College and the surrounding areas. The president of the JCD Chittagong Medical College unit and other leaders were arrested for collecting toll in the nearby market last year. (*The Independent*) <http://bangladesh-web.com/news/jul/11/111072003>.

*News from Bangladesh*

### **Where Monsters Roam Freely: Subhumans in the Subcontinent**

In Lahore, on an afternoon in 1998 when Nawaz Sharief's Shariat Law Bill passed the lower house of the Pakistani National Assembly, gangs of Jamaat-e-Islami males slashed the forearms of adolescent girls as they were returning home from school in their supposedly safe little groups. Young school girls in their starched white and blue salwar kameezes and bright white tennis shoes, clutching their books to their

chests, innocent and serious students, were attacked by men with hatred in their eyes and sharp blades in their hands. These innocents were attacked in the name of Allah. The next day the ladies of Lahore went out into the streets to protest the Shariat Law Bill, led by the indefatigable and internationally revered human rights activist, Asma Jahangir. These women delivered a strong message that South Asian Muslim women will not be legislated or coerced into a Taliban inspired life of fear, prejudice, and repression.

However, the political naïveté of the young Panjabi school girls was permanently disrupted. Though the wounds on their hands and elbows will heal, the scars will remain constant reminders—expressions of the violence that men can inflict upon women. The scabs which formed on their arms will soon fall away, but the fear of that moment will long remain, shaping their relationship to the outside world. Reminders that their female identity is a social liability in a country which allows repression and suppression of half of its population. A government does not have to actively promote gender violence to condone it. Simply looking the other way can encourage this type of hatred. What is needed is vigorous condemnation of the perpetrators, particularly violence in the name of ideology.

Hate crimes in the name of God? No religion should advocate hatred and violence, especially against its own believers! These hate mongers misuse religion and walk away unpunished, after revelling in their campaign of cruelty. The government is afraid or unwilling to act to close down the centers of hatred, for fear of a fundamentalist backlash. Unless something is done to limit the hatred

against women that is fomented at some of the militant madrassa schools, it will not be a backlash of hatred that the government will have to face, but a frontal attack. The young girls in Lahore were victims of this feverish hatred that can inspire men to attack unarmed children just because they are females. Their hatred destroys not only the trust of children who are the victims, but also destroys the perpetrators themselves, as they devolve back into predatory animals. It also tears apart the society and crushes all hope of a peaceful and prosperous future.

What is destroyed by this misdirected religiously justified hatred? What is reborn in the ashes of fear? Will these girls become trusting productive members in a society that easily forgives and actually fosters gender related crimes? Will the experience disfigure these girls psychologically and lead to an agoraphobic life behind curtains, hiding from religiously dysfunctional males who hate women, thereby emboldening and validating the tactics of the miscreants? Or will the blood shed, and the fear faced, force these dear girls to grow up too soon taking a stand along side millions of their Muslim sisters, and work to end gender discrimination? Their level of empowerment and healing greatly depends on how their families respond to the terrorism perpetuated on women in the name of religion. The wounds of these horrible hate crimes will eventually heal but the emotional scars may never disappear.

Women in Pakistan can be very tough. They were taught as girls not to laugh too much or appear too jolly in public. In Lahore and Islamabad the public realm is a serious place. Burqas are the exception among the women of Pakistan

who wear endless models of the modest salwar kameez, in varying degrees of fabulousness, with brightly coloured dupattas that are more likely to be thrown across their shoulders than draped over their heads, except during times of prayer. They go to work or school or to the market, usually in pairs, but also sometimes alone, with an aura of purposefulness. In public places in urban Pakistan, women are attractive and tough, they are attentive and reserved. Simultaneously, they exude a self contained certitude of purpose and a self conscious humility which allows them to gently navigate the exterior space.

Also, of course, to be seen in the market places of Pakistan, are many women in black burqas, who are shopping for vegetables and other commodities, hiding their faces behind the black filmy fabric that protects them from the lustful eyes of men who cannot control their own sexual fantasies. These fanatics, who have taken the words of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) far too literally when He warned that men need protection from femininity's fatal "nine parts of desire". Instead of looking within, they lash out with knives at school girls and even force their grandmothers to hide their faces in public. In a burqa, whether an elderly Begum or a young beautiful woman, both may find a certain freedom in the dark obscurity of the concealing garment. But they also find it quite difficult to manoeuvre, their vision being greatly restricted by the fabric over their eyes. Often they can barely see adequately to step up on a curb or around a speeding vehicle. Since they must hold the black veil closely against their eyes to be able to see well enough to walk, while at the same time

often holding a child in their arms, as well as a shopping bag, they are dangerously impeded, and they must walk slowly and carefully in order not to miss their step and trip over the many obstacles found on urban sidewalks such as uncovered manholes and piles of rubbish. With one hand holding the shopping bag, one hand holding the child, it is difficult to also hold the mesh veil obscuring their vision closely against their eyes thereby enabling them to actually see well enough to walk through the marketplace. . . how can they also hold their infant and a bag of groceries? For anyone who has never worn a black burqa on a hot day, the discomfort, inconvenience, and actual danger is inconceivable. The temperature inside a black burqa is at least ten degrees warmer than the air outside, and no breezes can cool the skin. They are prisoners of a medieval fashion. It is imposed upon them by fundamentalists who, though the centuries have stridently codified their misinterpretation of Muslim law. Mohammed is lauded in Islamic history for having improved the conditions of Bedouin women, why would his followers now torture women with a fashion that is not unlike a straitjacket used to control mental patients?

There are plenty of tough women in Bangladesh just as there are in Pakistan. But it is a different kind of toughness. There are more smiles in public and a naturalness that flows along with them, when they are out and about in Dhaka, travelling usually in pairs, for protection, wearing the flowing but modest sari or sometimes the salwar kameez. They can be shy, almost demure and diffident, playing a role that helps many Bangladeshi women blend

in and move about inconspicuously in Dhaka. But coyness is not the only strategy. There are many dynamic Bangladeshi women who are self confident and self motivated and find genuine respect in the society working for NGOs and other social organizations. She just has to keep her distance from the fundamentalist faction.

Up until the most recent elections, the fundamentalists' mandate in the realm of electoral politics were invalid, unsupported. The Jamaat-e-Islami candidates or other fundamentalist parties rarely won more than a few seats in the parliament. In Pakistan, they had never received more than eight percentage of the votes, nevertheless they wielded an inordinate amount of influence in the society. In Bangladesh, they received even less electoral support where only three of the parliamentary seats were won by them in the general election in June 1996. However, in Bangladesh the Jamaat-e-Islami party also has an almost free reign to terrorize women and influence young male students who actively work to keep women from empowering themselves politically and socially. These fundamentalists are obviously unpopular with the voters who value human rights and civil society. Both Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are eager to be respected among the community of nations as strong and stable states—political agendas that focuses on prosperity, national defense, and education. In the world today, how can such social misfits have such license to terrorize half of the citizens?

In 1998, I was in Dhaka during the weeks leading up to the Victory Day celebrations. During those cool hartal filled days, I followed the news and observed some of the events

leading up to December 16th. I read about the intellectuals who were brutally murdered by *razakars* only two days before the liberation of the country. Each morning I read the English newspapers, taking note of the wide disparities in political orientations. I avidly read about what the Awami League had to say, what the BNP proclaimed. I wanted to understand their different points of view. Day by day events across the country commemorated the liberation of different areas with stories about the final battles. There were no shortages of tales about brave freedom fighters and Mukhtijudda who helped to win the War of Liberation.

I am a student of history and intrigued about how nations represent their own pasts and how those representations change over time. I was therefore startled and befuddled by a situation which occurred a few days prior to the sixteenth of December in Brahmanbari, a city not far from Dhaka. There was to be a procession organized by one of the well known NGOs. Here were some poor village women, whose lives had been improved by the efforts of NGOs enhancing their livelihoods and educational abilities. These simple and patriotic women were brought together to celebrate the day Brahmanbari was liberated.

In love and appreciation of the sacrifice that their countrymen had made in 1971, they planned to stage a programme. In most nations, this would be an admirable expression of patriotism. In Brahmanbari, however, a local mullah at a madrassah made an announcement that Victory Day celebrations were against Islam. He stated that women should not be allowed out of their homes to celebrate this day when their loved ones, who had been fighting the

Pakistani occupation forces, came home to them in victory. A victory which brought them citizenship in a new country, Bangladesh—a new country which was won by untold suffering. These simple women of Brahmanbari understood that sacrifice, and planned a day to honour their heroes, living and dead. How could anyone, regardless of religious affiliation think that such a celebration was against God's wishes? This kind of misinterpretation of divinity is not only strange and demented but it is fascist and verging on insane.

Can you imagine? It is as if the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), a terrorist and racist organization in the USA, claimed that the Fourth of July was unchristian! It's inconceivable! Imagine that in today's world, the KKK announced their plan to attack a group of African-Americans holding an Independence Day celebration—basing their violence on the fact that in 1776, and at the time of the writing of the Constitution of the United States, just after the American War of Independence, Blacks were not citizens, they were slaves, so they shouldn't be allowed to celebrate. It is ludicrous! In today's world, the KKK, would never be allowed to attack such a commemoration, staged by African-Americans on the premise that it was not proper for Blacks to celebrate the Fourth of July because at the time of the Revolutionary War they were slaves. This is faulty logic and would be abhorred by all American citizens. The police force would put themselves between the two groups if necessary. Violence might occur, but not without a public response. However, when these simple ladies from the villages around Brahmanbari attempted to hold a Victory

Day celebration, they were attacked by the students of the *madrassa* who beat them with lathis and wielded long knives. Ironically, their rights were not guaranteed by the government that the ladies were cheering with their *Joy Banglas*!

According to the newspaper reports, several of the ladies were stripped of their saris, stripped of their saris in the name of Allah. And these are simple poor village women who usually don't wear petty coats under their saris. Nude and terrified, one ran into a store for help and was ironically, covered in a burqa. Offices of NGOs were smashed, including BRAC, because of their work for abandoned and needy women. Is this not reminiscent of Krystalnatch and pogroms? Does this not suggest the cruelty and irrationality of the crusades, of the holocaust? But, according to the news reports, the district magistrate in Brahmanbari did practically nothing to stop the carnage or the humiliation inflicted upon these ladies by the brutes who attacked them. Only after the men had come out of their medieval *madrassa* hiding places, and had begun beating and stripping the women, did the authorities move in and lob tear gas canisters, which injured and frightened more of the women than the well trained and ideologically hyped up men.

The plan that these intellectually and emotionally dysfunctional "students" were going to attack these women if they came out to honour their country was announced well in advance of the event. And yet no precautions were taken, no extra forces were sent in to guard the women. But what was most surprising, as described in the news reports of the events in Brahmanbari, was that an MP from

the BNP addressed the rally held by the fundamentalist clerics, encouraging the men and boys, before they poured out of the Madrassah to attack the women. Unbelievable! A member of parliament would actively support and encourage a group of terrorist-wannabes who claim that Victory Day celebrations are un-Islamic. Incredible! Rather disgraceful in a country that gave so many lives to obtain freedom.

In Bangladesh, all politicians pay lip service to the spirit of the Liberation War. They equally accuse one another of being part of the anti-liberation forces. It's ironic that the independence of Bangladesh is almost sacred, and at the same time, un-Islamic. However you look at religious beliefs, Bangladeshi independence was a gift from God. After nine months of Pakistani oppression under Tikka Khan, the butcher of Bengal, they suddenly had a country. During the civil war there was bravery and sacrifice by both genders, by people from all stratas of society, by citizens from all religious groups. There has to be a distortion of religion that prohibits poor women from commemorating such a momentous event. Obviously these pseudo clerics haven't got a clue about the real meaning of religion, which is peace and justice and human kindness and mutual respect.

In any society, there are the un-evolved who try to bring the rest of the nation down to their level. Strange when elected representatives defend their depravations. The people who have been elected to represent the masses should make it known to those who would like to belittle the freedom of the people who elected them, that Victory

Day celebrations are honourable and beloved activities, that all citizens have a right to express their love for their country and that intolerance and violence against citizens will not be tolerated. Protect the Constitution, protect women who want to commemorate the nation's birth, put a stop to hatred that is gender based anti-patriotic and senseless. These fundamentalists did not attack these innocent and patriotic women in the name of an ideology, it was in the name of an idiotology. Those perpetrators of this shameful event in Brahmanbari will surely perish and their evil deeds will follow them in the next life. They should not be encouraged by misguided MPs looking for votes from fundamentalists. This is the same strategy that Nawaz Sharief and his predecessor, General Zia-ul Haq and Zia's mentor Zulfikar Ali Bhutto used. They squandered their democracy, betrayed their country, caused untold hardships on the citizens by pandering to the fundamentalists, in an attempt to justify their shaky and unpopular regimes.

The fundamentalists enjoy a clout that far outweighs their actual popularity with the people. In Pakistan, they slash the arms of little schoolgirls. In Bangladesh, they strip old women naked and beat them in public. All in the name of God. They are the agents of hatred and destruction, just as they were when they operated as well organized *razakars* during the Bangladesh War of Liberation, when they aided the occupation army and butchered Bengalis by the hundreds. Their justice will come. . . no one can murder and terrorize, in the name of God, and expect to be rewarded in heaven. Ironically, the people of Bangladesh did not wait for the fires of hell to consume the souls of these hate

mongers, instead, on October 1, 2001, they elected them to public office!

Pakistan, that culturally expresses a far more fundamentalist ambience than Bengal, in the fall of 2002 elected Islamic parties at the center—for the first time in over fifty years of nationhood. The same thing happened in Bangladesh in the fall of 2001. In Bangladesh, the leader of the Jamaat-i-Islami, whose career started as leader of the *Razakars* during the War of Liberation, has been made a minister. Several other BNP governmental advisors, with full minister's status, are renowned al-Badr's, or were known to have a torture camp operating at their residences, or have been arrested for political murder as recently as within the past year. Quite disturbing in a world where the air waves are full of Osama bin Laden's call for international jihad.

The situation for Hindus in Bangladesh has degenerated since the election. Reports translated from Bengali sources, can be found on the web page of the HRCB, under the title: "15 thousands minority families dislodged in two districts: thousands of houses ablaze, hundreds of women raped" <[http://www.hrcbm.org/news/janakant\\_news.html](http://www.hrcbm.org/news/janakant_news.html)>. The "Daily Star" ran articles about violence against the minority community in some districts, and intimidation at the ballot box.

*Here is an excerpt from the news reports on the HRCB website:...*

15 thousands minority families dislodged in two districts: thousands of houses ablaze, hundreds of women raped

(Translated from Bengali) Report from Janakantha, Oct 10, 2001:

Post election violence and oppression against minority has displaced more than 15 thousands minority families in Barishal and Bagerhat districts. The affected upazilas (sub-districts) are Gournadi, Ujipur, Agailjara, Mullahat and Chitalmari. Hindu minorities from those upazilas are being forced out of their land and taken shelter at various villages in Ramshil upazila under Khotalipara districts. The displaced minorities have taken shelter to various schools and colleges at Ramshil bazaar and their relatives in those areas.

Islamic fundamentalists have initiated a rain of terror forcing minorities to endure living in a nightmare condition in those areas. Janakantha correspondence Mr. Mojammel Haq after visiting the affected areas today (Tuesday) described that the situation is far grave than the atrocities of 1971. Those family even not displaced in 1971, now they are facing far severe condition and being forced out of their own native land. The oppressed minority reported that due their support for Awami League in the election, BNP supporters went on rampage setting ablaze houses and raping women in Chadshi, Bahadurpur, Barthi, Pingolkati, Ashukati, Tarki Bandar, Narchira, and Sharikal under Gournadi and Rangtha, Bakal, Rajihar, Chingatia, Ramshidha, Dhanduba, Jayrampatti under Agailjara upazila and everywhere in Ujipur. With primitive laughter Islamic fundamentalists raped hundreds of women, removed eye of victims and loot all the belongings of minority victims. Such primitive and barbaric atrocities cannot be expressed

in words. Mr. Bimal Biswas, a leader of local Awami league described middle age lawlessness and barbaric rampage in the area.

He mentioned that Islamic fundamentalist gang raped mother and her daughters of a Hindu family from Uttachadni under Gournadi upazila in front of public eye. In another incident, three daughters of a minority family were taken out of their house and gang raped publicly by Islamic fundamentalist. He also told to the news conference that BNP cadres kidnapped most of the women and girls from the villages at night, raped them overnight and released them in the morning. Janakantha has also reported that Bangladesh government has not taken any step to prevent such atrocities nor has provided food and shelter to the thousands of victims. If food and shelter is not given immediately, most of the displaced families will starve from lack of food and water.

Pretty disturbing turn of events in Bangladesh, and though related to the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> news media frenzy, has received no press coverage whatsoever. Thus do things continue in Bangladesh.

### **Late Sheikh Mujib is under attack by new government**

BY SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

DHAKA, December 24: The Begum Khaleda Zia government has taken yet another major step canceling the public holidays on March 17 and August 15 marking the birth day and the day of assassination of country's slain founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Seen by political

commentators an act of the "hardliners" in the new government overpowering the "liberals" who wanted the government to move cautiously, the latest move was taken at a weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday with Prime Minister Begum Zia in the chair. Though the government has not taken any decision to remove the portraits of Mujib, still hang in all government offices across the country, the mood of the new state power towards the country's slain founding hero, who was assassinated on August 15, 1975, was amply clear. Analysts believe that the decision to cancel the National Mourning Day on August 15, the day Mujib was killed three years after he led Bangladesh to freedom, has been a major political decision the BNP and Jamaat coalition government has undertaken. And this may greatly influence the future course of politics in Bangladesh. Awami League, now the major opposition, has termed the move as "a clear step to protect the killers of Bangabandhu" and said "we have now no option but to resist." The killers of Mujib, all ex-army officers, were condemned to death by the trial court nearly two years ago. Their death penalties were later endorsed by the High Court, but execution of capital punishment is being delayed due to a fresh appeal placed before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. With the new government in office, the old organisations patronised by the coup plotters of 1975, have also started re-emerging. These organisations have demanded release of all convicted ex-army officials from jail. In fact, it was apparent from the beginning that the "hardliners" in the government, with active support from the Jamaat-E-Islami, the party which opposed Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan, intend to go all

out against Mujib, who still symbolises the spirit of nation's independence from Pakistan and secular democracy. The "indiscriminate ouster" of high officials having Freedom Fighter's background from almost all tiers of the government has also become a major issue that has already turned the pro-liberation lobby highly skeptical about the new government. The Khaleda government is also under fire from pro-liberation politicians and secular intellectuals for "deliberately ignoring" the significance of the "National Victory Day" that commemorates the historic surrender of the Pakistani forces in Dhaka at the joint Bangladesh-India command on December 16, 1971 after nine months war. It is also facing strong criticism for not properly observing the "National Martyrs Intellectuals Day" on December 14 which commemorates the brutal slaughtering of dozens of leading Bengali intellectuals by the local collaborators of the Pakistani army at the fag end of the war. Meanwhile, all the leading accused of the "Jail Killing case" of 1975, who were earlier charged-sheeted by the Sheikh Hasina government for assassinating the country's four prominent independence war heroes inside the Dhaka Central Jail a few months after Mujib's assassination, have come out of prison. One of the accused, KM Obaidur Rahman, now an MP of BNP while Shah Moazzem Hossain and Nurul Islam Manjoor got bails from the court. The four national leaders killed inside the jail included Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed, who led Bangladesh's provisional government during the independence war. The government meanwhile released dozens of religious fundamentalist leaders who were charged sheeted by police during the past Awami League government on charges of

terrorist activities. Mr. Tariqul Islam, who is the accused number one in the highly sensitive UDICHI bomb blast case, was inducted as a cabinet minister. More than 12 cultural activists were blown up by two powerful bombs in Jessore a few years ago at an open cultural function organised by the UDICHI, a leading body.

[http://www.tripurainfo.com/bangladesh\\_diary/dhaka8.shtml](http://www.tripurainfo.com/bangladesh_diary/dhaka8.shtml)

# Chronology of Important Events

[http://www.geocities.com/banglar\\_web/banglar/bangla/bangla\\_history\\_banglaMod.htm](http://www.geocities.com/banglar_web/banglar/bangla/bangla_history_banglaMod.htm)

*March 26-28, 1971*

Following a bloody crackdown by the Pakistan army, the Bengali nationalists declare an independent People's Republic of Bangladesh with Mujib, imprisoned in West Pakistan, declared provisional president.

As fighting increases between the army and the Mukti Bahini (Force for Freedom – the Bengali militia), the flow of refugees from the area began pouring into India, especially the northeastern state of Assam. Within a few weeks, the tide of refugees had turned into a flood and an estimated 10 million Bengalis had already crossed over into India.

*April 17, 1971*

Formal declaration of independence of Bangladesh issued; Mujib named president

*December 3, 1971*

Pakistan launches preemptive air strikes against India [in Punjab, in the West]

*December 4, 1971*

India invades East Pakistan [Third Indo-Pakistan War]

*December 6, 1971*

India recognizes Bangladesh

*December 16, 1971*

Pakistani military forces in East Pakistan surrender to Indian armed forces, marking Bangladeshi independence

### **Independent Bangladesh**

*January 10-12, 1972*

Mujib returns from prison in West Pakistan; promulgates interim Constitution and is sworn in first as president, then as prime minister

*November 4, 1972*

Parliamentary Constitution adopted

*March 7, 1973*

Mujib's Awami League wins overwhelming victory in parliamentary elections

*February 22, 1974*

Pakistan recognizes Bangladesh

*September 17, 1974*

Bangladesh admitted to United Nations

*December 28, 1974*

State of emergency declared as political situation deteriorates; fundamental rights under Constitution suspended

*January 25, 1975*

Constitution amended, abolishing parliamentary system and establishing presidential system with de facto one-man rule under Mujib

*February 25, 1975*

Mujib abolishes all parties but one—the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (Bangladesh Peasants, Workers, and People's League), the new name of the Awami League—which is under his direct control

*August 15, 1975*

Mid-level army officers assassinated Mujib and most of his family; his daughter, Sheikh Hasina (the current leader of Awami League Party), happened to be out of the country. This was called the "majors' plot." A new government, headed by former Mujib associate Khandakar Moshtaque, was formed.

*November 30, 1976*

Successive military coups resulted in the emergence of Army chief of staff Zia-ur Rahman (Zia) becomes chief martial law administrator

*April 21, 1977*

Sayem forced to resign because of "ill health"; Zia becomes president

*May 30, 1977*

Zia wins 98.9 percent of votes in referendum on his continuance as president

*June 3, 1977*

Supreme Court justice Abdus Sattar named vice president

*April 1978*

Zia announces new elections and independent judiciary; lifts ban on political parties

*June 3, 1978*

Zia elected president

*February 18, 1979*

Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party wins 207 out of 300 seats in parliamentary election [Current leader of BNP, Begum Khaleda Zia, is the widow of Gen. Zia]

*April 6, 1979*

Martial law revoked; Constitution restored in full; Fifth Amendment ratifies all actions of Zia's martial law administration

*May 30, 1981*

Zia assassinated; Sattar becomes acting president

*November 15, 1981*

Sattar elected president

*March 24, 1982*

Sattar ousted in coup engineered by Lieutenant General Ershad; Constitution suspended, Parliament dissolved, and political parties abolished; Ershad assumes full powers as chief martial law administrator

*February 14-15, 1983*

Student riots mark first major expression of public opposition to Ershad's martial law administration

*March 1982-December 1983*

Interim presidency of Abdul Fazal Muhammad Ahsanuddin Chowdhury

*December 1983*

Ershad assumes presidency

*March 21, 1985*

General referendum supports Ershad's administration

*May 7, 1986*

Parliamentary elections give pro-Ershad Jatiyo Party (National Party) majority in parliament

*October 15, 1986*

Ershad elected president

*November 10, 1986*

Parliament passes Seventh Amendment to Constitution, ratifying all actions of Ershad's martial law administration; martial law withdrawn; Constitution restored in full

*November 10-12, 1987*

"Siege of Dhaka," mass demonstrations by united Opposition parties against Ershad's government

*December 6, 1987*

Ershad dissolves Parliament and holds fresh elections that both Awami League and BNP boycott. Ershad's Jatiyo Party wins 251 of the 300 seats. The parliament, while still regarded by the opposition as an illegitimate body, passes a large number of bills.

*June 7, 1988*

Eighth Amendment establishes Islam as state religion

*1989-1990*

Domestic political opposition to Ershad's rule regains momentum, escalating to frequent general strikes, increased campus protests, public rallies and a general disintegration of law and order by the end of 1990.

*December 6, 1990*

Ershad offers his resignation and goes on to serve a prison sentence on corruption charges.

*February 27, 1991*

An interim government oversees what most observers believed to be the most free and fair elections to date. The center-right BNP won a plurality of seats and formed a coalition government with the Islamic fundamentalist party Jamaat-i-Islami, with Khaleda Zia, widow of Zia-ur Rahman, as prime minister.

More changes to the constitution, recreating a parliamentary system and returning governing power to the office of the prime minister, as in Bangladesh's original 1972 Constitution.

*December 1994*

The Opposition resigned en masse from parliament. The Opposition then continued a campaign of marches, demonstrations and strikes, in an effort to force the government to resign.

*February 15, 1996*

National elections, but the opposition, including the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina Wajed, boycotts these. Khaleda Zia was re-elected by a landslide in voting boycotted and denounced as unfair by the three main opposition parties. Escalating political turmoil.

*June 1996*

New parliamentary elections; won by the Awami League; party leader Sheikh Hasina became prime minister.

1999

Khaleda Zia forms four-party alliance of opposition parties.

*October 2001*

Khaleda Zia's alliance wins majority. She becomes PM again (continues until now)

Zia's time was one of the most bloodiest too. He faced twenty-nine military coups against him where all of the failed coup members faced summary execution in the firing squads, including the whole Bengal Cavalry and Lancers. In 1981, Zia was killed in a coup in Chittagaong. His successor Justice Sattar ruled briefly before he was overthrown by General Ershad in a military coup in 1982.

Ershad ruled with an iron fist with the Army in the streets for a while, before easing down and promising for new elections due to mass uprising among the public and university campuses. One of the biggest and deadliest mass uprising in 1987, General Ershad was forced to drop military rule and give general election.

The new polarization of politics started with the emergence of two women in politics: Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of slain founder of the country Sheikh Mujib and Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of General Zia.

Ershad ruled with an iron fist but was forced to resign in a mass uprising in 1990. Chief Justice Shahab Uddin Ahmed took over the interim government until a newly-elected government took over. General Ershad went to jail facing, among many other charges, crime against the nation and violation of the constitution.

Begum Zia won the majority seats to form a government and unanimously, the new parliament decided to change to a parliamentary-style government from presidential rule as it was before the military took over in 1975.

Unfortunately, there were widespread corruption again as before and some top-level ruling leaders were found to harness known-terrorists in their shelter. Begum Zia was forced to resign and a new interim government took over under Justice Habibur Rahamn. Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujib, won the next election to become the prime minister.

Due to ideological and personal differences, two leaders never got along quite right. Also, getting used to a democratic system was not a easy deal for many political parties and interest group which themselves are not democratic to start with. The BNP and Jamaat organized protest to force Sheikh Hasina from power. However, their political base was not strong enough to yield any results. The country faced endless strikes and violence.

After five years in power, in 2001, Sheikh Hasina did not win the election held under an interim government. The interim government became involved in many controversial decisions, and amid allegations of vote rigging, Khaleda Zia came back to power. This time, with support from Jamaat and other right-wing parties.

[http://www.geocities.com/banglar\\_web/banglar/bangla/bangla\\_history\\_banglaMod.htm](http://www.geocities.com/banglar_web/banglar/bangla/bangla_history_banglaMod.htm)

*Wednesday, February 7, 2001*

<http://www.indianexpress.com/ie/daily/20010207/iin07009.html>

## **Bangladesh Opposition steps up Islamic campaign, calls for strikes**

REUTERS

DHAKA, FEB 6: Opposition parties in Bangladesh have called for strikes from Wednesday as part of a campaign against a court ruling banning religious edicts that could, among other things, subject women accused of adultery to torture.

On Saturday, Islamic militants killed a policemen and assaulted several others during a day-long strike in Dhaka called to oppose the ruling and denounce the foreign-funded non-government organisations that supported it.

Opposition parties said on Tuesday they had called the strikes to press for the release of radical Islamic leaders who were arrested during the demonstrations.

The protests follow a high court ruling in December to ban certain fatwas, or Islamic edicts, that could subject women to torture for alleged adultery and prevent them from mixing and working with men.

The strike call follows a warning by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that orthodox Islamic and conservative political groups were trying to plunge the country into chaos.

The stoppage on Wednesday has been called by a four-party Opposition alliance headed by former Prime Minister

Begum Khaleda Zia, chief of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Another strike set for Thursday has been called by the Islami Constitution Movement (ICM).

"We have called for a countrywide strike on Wednesday to press for the release of Shaikhul Hadis Moulana Azizul Huq and Moulana Mufti Amini, president and secretary-general of Islami Oikyo Jote, and others detained by police," said Sadek Hossain Khoka, a central leader of the BNP.

The Jote is BNP's alliance partner, along with the Jatiya Party of jailed former president Hossain Mohammad Ershad and the fundamentalist Jamaat-E-Islami party.

"We will enforce strike all over the country on Thursday to obtain release of the Jote leaders and protest against the government's repressive policies," ICM publicity secretary Syed Belayet Hossain told Reuters

Khoka and Hossain both criticised what they called "barbaric police action" against protesters and renewed their parties' demand for the resignation of the government.

Hasina has refused to quit under pressure, and on Monday she urged "freedom and democracy-loving Bangladeshis to rise against those trying to misuse Islam for gaining political power."

Islamic activists enforced a strike in the town of Brahmanbaria, east of Dhaka, on Tuesday, disrupting train services between Dhaka and the Port city of Chittagong.

At least 150 people were injured on Monday in clashes between police and militants Chittagong and Brahmanbaria.

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A never ending source of wonder and prayer.

# Notes

- 1 An area less than half the size of the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP).
- 2 Not much larger than the US state of Alabama, slightly smaller than Iowa.
- 3 Even with the trauma of its birth, and the murder of the founding father, and the years of military rule, since 1971 the demographic statistics of Bangladesh have improved. Due in large part to the incredible number of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) that operate in Bangladesh, birth rates have gone down and literacy rates have gone up, even though economic statistics remain abysmally poor.  
4 [http://www.weeklyholiday.net/23\\_11/met.html](http://www.weeklyholiday.net/23_11/met.html)
- 5 Two daughters were not murdered because they were in Germany at the time. One of them, Sheikh Hasina would go on to be elected prime minister in 1996.
- 6 During the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947, up to a million people were killed as they fled across the newly created borders of India and Pakistan, the murders were committed by both religious communities. In comparison, in 1971, in an onslaught that lasted nine months, up to three million Bengalis lost their lives. In this case, it was the Pakistani Army that systematically sought to eliminate Bengalee nationalists and in particular, Bengali Hindus.

- 7 Bengali is the usual spelling for this adjective, but in East Pakistan the spelling Bengalee was popularized in the context of "Bengalee Nationalism" and has special meaning with this spelling in this particular usage.
- 8 Textbooks in Pakistan after 1971, blamed India for the loss of the eastern wing and the historical narrative took on a virulent anti-Indian tone, eliminating almost all non-Muslim history.
- 9 From former ambassador from Bangladesh to the USA, Ambassador Tariq Karim, a friend and advisor, read an earlier version of this paper and commented about the establishment of the Awami League and the political situation in East and West Pakistan at the time. Such events made the existence of Bangladesh an inevitability, "The Muslim League was indeed founded in Dhaka, or at least its first meeting took place in Dhaka, convened by the Nawab of Dhaka. The ruling elite of East Bengal like the Nawab of Dhaka were more north Indian in orientation than the indigenous Bengalis over whom they ruled. Fazlul Huq did indeed switch to the Muslim League (reflecting political convenience more than ideological conviction, in a sense), in a rivalry with Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy who displaced him as chief minister of United Bengal. Fazlul Huq was a member of the official delegation from Bengal to the All India Muslim League Conference in Lahore in 1940 but Suhrawardy was not invited. Nevertheless, the latter went uninvited, and pleaded ardently that Bengal should be allowed to form its own commonwealth of association with its adjoining states after Indian independence. This call was ignored. In a sense, Suhrawardy was calling for acceptance of the original British plan for a confederal or federal India. Suhrawardy was banned from entering Pakistan in its early years, and after he did so, he

founded the Awami League party, of which Mujib became the secretary general. There is a political continuity here that few realize, that made the emergence of Bangladesh an inevitability at the very birth of Pakistan in 1947. The insensitivity and mistakes of Pakistani leaders, starting with Jinnah Sheikh, served to set the divisive tectonic plates into motion. Mujib-ur Rahman's six-point program in the early 1960s was essentially a reiteration of this. The Brits understood the political creature that they had constructed better than those creatures did. With hindsight, that is what Indians should have adopted, but for short-sightedness, numerous errors of judgement and inflated egos of leaders across the divide that resulted in what I look upon as a blunder of monumental proportions for which the peoples of South Asia today are, all, paying a heavy price."

- 10 Literally, "Friend of Bengal", Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahman was a political figure in Bangladesh who was elected prime minister of United Pakistan in December 1970 and was instead arrested by the Pakistani Army on March 25, 1971. Mujib's demands were for more autonomy, not for complete independence, but after his arrest, the violent crackdown by the Pakistani Army against the Bangladeshi population, brought on the civil war.

- 11 Bhutto was prime minister between 1971, when he assumed the leadership of West Pakistan and oversaw the writing of the country's first democratically constructed constitution and 1976 when he was arrested by his military chief of staff, General Zia-ul Haq. Z.A. Bhutto was hung by Zia after a kangaroo court trial.

- 12 See: *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Text-books in Pakistan*, compiled by A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute in Islamabad, examines the jihadi-centric, xenophobic model

installed by Gen. Zia. Full text available at: [http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/society\\_resources\\_frameset.htm](http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/society_resources_frameset.htm) See also: Pervez Hoodbhoy and A.H. Nayyar, "Rewriting the History of Pakistan" in Khan, Asghar, (ed.), *Islam, Politics, and the State*, (Zed Press, 1985), pp. 164. Nayyar and Hoodbhoy commence this now dated, but remarkably ahead-of-its-time analysis, with a prophetic comment about the inevitable and eventual blowback from General Zia's efforts to Islamize the educational system, "the full impact of which will probably be felt by the turn of the century, when the present generation of school children attains maturity." These words were written eighteen years ago and the fruits of madrasa education and a highly Islamized curriculum are everywhere evident in contemporary Pakistani society and politics.

- 13 Tariq Karim commented: "Bhutto's speech after the fall of Dhaka on December 16, 1971 is noteworthy—he harangued about Muslim Bengal having been betrayed, and predicted that one day it would return to the fold. This is a philosophy that is subliminally still nurtured by many in Pakistan, not least the military—the ISI still plays its war games accordingly. The schizophrenic politics of Bangladesh today are a reflection of this."

- 14 Textbooks in Pakistan after 1971, blamed the loss of the eastern wing on India and the historical narrative took on a virulent anti-Indian tone, eliminating almost all non-Muslim history.

- 15 The full name of Sheikh Hasina's father is "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman". He is variously called Mujib, or Sheikh Mujib, or Mujib Rahman, or Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib. For diehard Awami League loyalists, it is simply Bangabandhu, no Mujib or Rahman necessary.

- 16 Among the people I met at the NCTB in Dhaka in 1998 and 1999, most supported the recent Awami League revisions but were critical of the changes that had been "forced on them" during the decades of military rule. This may have been because the Awami League was in power and employees who supported them were empowered and not inhibited to speak their minds. NCTB employees who were supportive of the BNP's view of the history of the Liberation War may have been less vocal in 1998, sulking in their offices, hesitant to speak up against the changes. I did meet one or two employees who seemed to personify that perspective. After 2001, the BNP made several alterations in the textbooks that reversed the Awami League revisions. This was accomplished within a month of the BNP's return to power.
- 17 First published: 1996. Revised: March 2001. Revised: November 2001.
- 18 Courtesy, K.I. "Shefa" Iqbal.
- 19 Social Science for class IX-X. First published: 1996. Revised: March 2001. Revised: November 2001, translated by K.I. "Shefa" Iqbal.
- 20 These two topics will be discussed below. *Razakars* were groups of pro-Pakistani, Bengali Islamic fundamentalists who were responsible for the murder of thousands of Bangladeshis.
- 21 In Bengali or Bangla, "Bahini" is used to mean army or band, as in Muktibahini, or liberation army or forces. The word "hanadar" means attacker or aggressor. In this ironic usage by the author of this piece, "Hanadar Bahini" is a euphemism for the Pakistani Army. When I asked a Bangladeshi friend to explain the meaning of this word, and its usage in this article, he wrote, "This term is now mainly used by the f@#\$%^ pro-Pakistani/Jamaati Rajakar/al-Badrs, who are doing their best to erase all memory of

Pakistan's involvement. It was probably first coined by pro-muktijodho in 1971 when the meaning was clear".

- 22 A.H. Jaffor Ullah. <http://bangladesh-web.com/news/mar/28/f28032002.htm>, A divided nation after 31 years of independence.
- 23 Khan is a common last name in Afghanistan and the northern provinces of Pakistan. The title, Khan, was used by descendants of Genghis Khan who, after invading Afghanistan, converted to Islam. Khans are known as fierce warriors
- 24 I always felt that there was a retired teacher somewhere in Dhaka who had saved her old textbooks, but I was never able to locate that personal library.
- 25 Though Zia came to power in a coup in November 1975, he could not consolidate his hold on governance and it wasn't until 1977 that new textbooks were published. His assassination in 1981 left the job of revisions to his successor, General Ershad.
- 26 (1) Social Science for class Seven, Geography section: Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed MABT, retired Headmaster of West End High School, Dhaka; History section: Mr. Abdus Sattar, retired principal, Chittangong Government College, Chittagong; Civics section: Mr. A. A. Khalilur Rahman, headmaster Collegiate School, Dhaka. Editors, Mr. M. I. Choudhury, assistant director of public education department, Education Directorate Dhaka, Bangladesh, Mr. Mohammed Nurul Karim, retired principal of Rajshahi Teachers' Training College, Mr. Khurshid Alam, poet Nazrul Islam college, Dhaka. The inside states that "This book is selected for the year 1973 by Bangladesh School Textbook Board, first edition May 1973 price 1.50 taka, printed by Pioneer Press, Ramakanta Nandi Lane, Dhaka". (2) History of Bangladesh and India For Class Nine and Ten, published

- by Bangladesh School Textbook Board for the year of 1976, first published June 1973, reprint: January 1974, May 1974, January 1976. Author and editor: Muhammad Ishaq, M.A.B.S.E.S., former principal of Azizul Huq College, Bogra.
- 27 Ershad was Zia's chief of staff. He was not involved in the assassination.
- 28 From interviews with several Bangladeshi graduate students.
- 29 These statements were selected from several interviews with Bangladeshis.
- 30 I have not seen the new textbooks recently published since the BNP returned to power, so I cannot be certain without actually reading through the new textbooks, how India and Hindus are treated in the re-revised editions, but since they are not a party that is friendly to India, the narrative may be less favourable. More than likely, the treatment of Hindus is not the issue, but the contentious debate regarding who contributed more to the birth of the nation and what was the role of the military and *razakars*.
- 31 Mrs. Gandhi is simultaneously blamed and lauded for "sinking the Two Nation Theory in the Bay of Bengal".
- 32 Prior to 1947, the center of Bengali culture was Calcutta, now spelled as Kolkata. In his review of this study, Professor Rod Moag suggested that I remind the reader that, "The province of Bengal in pre-independence included all the Bengalis, and there are millions of Bengalis in the Indian state of West Bengal with whom many Bangladeshis feel more cultural affinity than with their coreligionists in West Pakistan. The seat of traditional Bengali culture is, of course, Calcutta from which Bangladeshis are now pretty much cut off."
- 33 Ambassador Tariq Karim commented that the restrictions on "Rabindra Sangeet" began "even actually earlier—I was a student, and student cultural functions would extol

Rabindra sangeet— that the Establishment would frown upon”.

34 From a 1999 interview with a professor at Dhaka University, who prefers to remain unnamed as did most interviewees in Bangladesh.

35 The Six Point Plan demanded economic and political autonomy for East Pakistan, while remaining in Pakistan.

36 Nayar, Kuldeep. “Between the Lines: Bangladesh—A Country Ridden with Internal Conflicts”, *The Indian Express*, February 06, 2002, [http://fecolumnists.expressindia.com/full\\_column.php?content\\_id=1972](http://fecolumnists.expressindia.com/full_column.php?content_id=1972).

37 Bengali for “Friend of Bengal”.

38 Arabic for “Leader of the Country”.

39 Amb. T. Karim commented, “Jinnah’s address to the Bengalis at Dhaka in 1948 was a profound shock to the Bengalis—I still remember the hushed shock reflected in my elders’ faces on that day—although I was a just kid of 6 then.”

40 In the textbooks that were revised by Awami League scholars in 1996 the word “uncontested” was placed in front of the words “father of the nation”. In 2001, when the BNP reissued revised editions of this textbook, they hadn’t removed Mujib completely but they did extract the word “uncontested”.

41 When Gen. Zia came to power in November 1975, there was too much political instability to worry about rewriting textbooks, but the new editions of the 1973 textbooks, published in 1977 seem to have had controversial additions and deletions

42 This is the gist of the narrative found in 1973-75 era textbooks.

43 There had been years of political efforts by the people of both wings of Pakistan to remove the military government and hold elections. Pro-democracy protests in both East and West Pakistan forced General Ayub Khan to step down and

pass the reigns of government on to General Yahya Khan who announced elections. Z.A. Bhutto won the majority of the votes in the western wing, while Mujib won a landslide in East Pakistan, which qualified him to serve as prime minister. The military and Bhutto were opposed to letting Mujib become prime minister so they denied the elections, and instead began a violent military action in the eastern wing. The war lasted for nine months and took over one million Bengali lives, though that number is disputed with some claiming, as did Sheikh Mujib, that at least three million died; others, such as pro-Pakistani Islamists estimate no more than a few hundred thousand were killed. The real numbers will never be known, but at the height of the war there were ten million refugees in West Bengal, Hindus in particular were being targeted by the Pakistani Army.

44 From an interview in March 1999.

45 The name "Pakistan" is an acronym for Punjab + Afghanistan (meaning the Pathans of the NWFP) + Sindh + stan for Baluchistan. The "K" is for "Kashmir". East Bengal did not figure in the original vision.

46 See the homepage page of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party: <http://www.bnepbd.com/>.

47 Arabic for God willing.

48 History of Bangladesh and India for Class Nine and Ten, published by the Bangladesh School Textbook Board for the year 1976, first published June 1973, reprints: January 1974, May 1974, January 1976. Author and editor Muhammad Ishaq, M.A.B.S.E.S, former professor of history at Dhaka University and other government colleges, former principal of Azizul Haq College, Bogra, p. 403 (Translation by Iftekhar "Shefa" Iqbal, M.A. Dhaka).

49 When the war was over and Zia returned to Dhaka, he refused to cohabitate with Khalida because she had spent

the past nine months in the cantonment with Pakistani officers. During those weeks that Mujib was urging Zia to reconcile with his wife, I was told that Khalida moved in with Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina, who comforted her. It is ironic that today, thirty years later, these two ladies are locked in a violent political confrontation. It is also well known that even after accepting his wife back, in spite of her tainted reputation, they were seen as estranged and Khalida rarely appeared in public with her husband, even after he made himself president following the murder of Sheikh Mujib. If this bit of gossip were just a rumour, I doubt that it would have been repeated to me so many times. I even asked BNP supporters about this information, and they did not deny it, though they excused Khalida and swore that she had remained chaste while living under the protection of the Pakistani officers. Her husband was not so sure, but thanks to Mujib he took her back anyway, though he did not consider her an equal partner. Khalida was a very attractive housewife with a tenth grade education. These facts add an surreal touch to her current elevation as head of her husband's party, the BNP.

50 From the web page written by Tito Scohel & Scyma Hesser, May 2000, Muktaadhara, <http://members.tripod.com/scohel/page34.html>. Tito Scohel is a native of Bangladesh who now lives in Australia.

51 *ibid.*

52 Bengali for radio centre.

53 Published in Holiday's Special Anniversary Edition October 1999

54 Rashiduzzaman is a very controversial Bangladeshi historian, who it is claimed by many, supported the Pakistani side of the war. There was a very informative and one could say, juicy debate between Dr. Rashiduzzaman and numerous

Bangladeshi scholars and activists. That dialogue can be found at: [http://cyber\\_bangla0.tripod.com/Debate/NFB.html](http://cyber_bangla0.tripod.com/Debate/NFB.html) and at [http://cyber\\_bangla0.tripod.com/Debate/Jinnah\\_Debate.html](http://cyber_bangla0.tripod.com/Debate/Jinnah_Debate.html).

- 55 The role that Zia played in the liberation war is contested, as would be expected in such a vitiated atmosphere. Zia was a very patriotic Pakistani, and it was not easy for him to go over to the side of rebellion. There are mixed reviews, but one reader of this paper commented that, "I have a friend whose brother was in Zia's unit at the time—this friend of mine had a different story to tell as heard from his brother, about Zia's 'spontaneous' heroism—but his brother is long dead.
- 56 Amb. Karim commented, "Wasn't it Dr. Goebbels who said: if a lie is repeated often enough, over a long period of time, it transforms into the truth?—thus were mythologies created in the past, and now as well."
- 57 A.H. Jaffor Ullah. A divided nation after 31 years of independence, <http://bangladesh-web.com/news/mar/28/f28032002.htm>
- 58 Due to some of his autocratic initiatives that were implemented during 1974-75 that will be discussed below.
- 59 It was said that government employees and intellectuals were not as intimidated by Ershad as by Zia and were able to make some corrections in the manner in which the story of the creation of the nation was told when the 1977 Zia era textbooks were revised in 1984.
- 60 Administrative and electoral districts.
- 61 The academic environment at Dhaka University is dangerously politicized. There is often violence between opposing student groups, classes are often interrupted and vandalism of student hostels is common. Because of

numerous student agitations and protests examinations and graduation were often delayed.

62 The USSR also contributed significantly.

63 Training from whom? Arms arranged at whose cost?

64 Translation by Iftekhar "Shefa" Iqbal, M.A. (Dhaka).

65 Anthony Mascarenhas was a reporter for *Dawn*, a West Pakistani newspaper. He was in Dhaka at the time of the crackdown. He witnessed things other journalists were not allowed to see as they were all evacuated. Mascarenhas was the first one to report on the violent excesses of the Pakistani Army. He broke the story to the world. He has written numerous frank and very factual books on Bangladesh.

66 Naturally the NCTB textbooks can't talk about events in 1975 since the post-1971 history of Bangladesh is yet to be written.

67 *Shahitya Konika*, First print: November 1996, Revised edition: November 2000, Revised edition: November 2001, Reprinted: December 2002

68 In an email letter from Shefa in Dhaka.

69 *The History of Bangladesh For Class Nine and Ten*, written and edited by Muhammad Nurul Islam, Muhammad Ramzan, R.M. Zakir Hossain, Dr. Mofizullah Kabir, Dr. S. M. Hasan, January 1984, Revised edition: December 1987, Reprint: December, 1994, National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) Dhaka.

70 The worst insult in Bangladesh is to be called "anti-liberation war".

71 This inability to write post-independence textbook history, is an issue.

72 Many of the alterations in the textbooks were subtle, and thus Awami League supporters would later claim, more insidious.

- 73 From a paper by the writer, film maker, poet, and human rights advocate, Shahriar Kabir, "Human Rights in Bangladesh: Focus on Communal Persecution" written for the conference on Human Rights in Bangladesh, held on August 17, 2002, at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Shahriar Kabir was arrested for subversion, charging that he had criticized the government of Bangladesh. Many other liberal intellectuals and human rights activists have been incarcerated on such charges since October 2001, when the BNP and the coalition of Islamic parties regained control of the government. I interviewed Shahriar Kabir in Dhaka in 1999.
- 74 Because of this and other factors, "There has been a steady flow of Hindus out of Bangladesh to India, reducing the proportion of Hindu population in Bangladesh". (comment by Amb. Tariq Karim)
- 75 Kabir, Shahriar. "Human Rights in Bangladesh: Focus on Communal Persecution", Conference on Human Rights in Bangladesh, held on 17 August 2002, at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada
- 76 October 1997, pp. 98,
- 77 quoted from: Saleem Samad, *State of Minorities in Bangladesh*, op cit.
- 78 Dr. Maniruzzaman. 1990. *Bangladesh Politics: Secular and Islamic Trends*. New Delhi: pp.'s 73-74
- 79 Comment by Ambassador Tariq Karim.
- 80 Powerful Sindhi landholders infamous for exploiting their tenant farmers. The Bhuttos were a Wadera family.
- 81 This was discussed in detail in the previous chapter about Pakistani textbooks.
- 82 Another comparison can be made between the two countries during the late seventies and eighties, when they were both ruled by military rulers who were advancing an Islamisation

program in politics, education, in all aspects of civil society. For a few years, between 1977 when General Zia-ul Haq staged his coup in Pakistan and before the murder of General Zia-ur Rahman's in 1981, both wings were ruled by a general named Zia who tried to institutionalize Islam as the supreme political power of the land. How that worked out in the two countries is very different, but the efforts of both Zias were successful in the long run.

83 Saleem Samad, op cit.

84 "As he tried," added Ambassador Karim, "to 'Islamize' and desecularise the constitution".

85 Ibid.

86 The irony of Ershad is that he is known as a prolific womanizer. It is said that all the pretty single forty year old women in Dhaka led the processions in support of Ershad. He was an avid golfer and drinker ... yet, he institutionalized by decree a process of Islamisation of Bangladeshi government and society that ended the non-sectarian nature of the original Constitution and the essence of the message of the Liberation War. For a country that had just liberated itself from a certain medievalism inherent in the tone of the Preamble of the Pakistani Constitution, it is indeed ironic that a philanderer implemented such a narrow religiously based interpretation of Bangladeshi nationalism.

87 Hartals, literally "all locks" is a strike or a bandh or a boycott.

88 The name of this Islamic organization has several spelling that are used.

89 *History of Bangladesh for Class Nine and Ten*, written and edited by Muhammad Nurul Karim et al. First Published: January 1984, Revised edition: December 1987, Reprint 1994, NCTB, Dhaka.

90 Also known as the "Butcher of Baluchistan" for his mass executions in that province.

- 91 Ambassador Karim observed that the "The US has completed ratification process of the agreement signed in 2001 for extradition of the two killers who are resident in the United States, but the present BNP government has shown no inclination to pursue this any further nor demand this".
- 92 Samad, Saleem. Threats and intimidation for secular and independent press in Bangladesh, was "presented on the auspices of World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2003" Dhaka.
- 93 Informed individuals who prefer to remain nameless, have told me that they have uncontested information that the Pakistani Intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), contributed large sums of money to the BNP's campaign.
- 94 From an e-mail communication with a Bangladeshi friend.
- 95 *The Daily Star*, November 7, 1998, page 12.
- 96 Such as Professor M. Rashiduzaman, discussed below.
- 97 Rashiduzaman's disdain for Mujib can be detected in this reference.
- 98 Mascarenhas also mentions that Mujib told him, in London, right after his release from nine months in prison in Pakistan, that he and Bhutto had spoken about the possibility of some kind of joint governing. Mascarenhas was appalled and thought that Mujib was out of touch with the sentiments of his countrymen who had just won their new country amid vast devastation. Mujib soon realized this as he emerged from his isolation and returned a hero to Bangladesh.
- 99 This fascinating and very revealing debate can be found at: [http://cyber\\_bangla0.tripod.com/Debate/NFB.html](http://cyber_bangla0.tripod.com/Debate/NFB.html)
- 100 Refers to the Pakistani Army
- 101 It must be also pointed out that during his time as prime minister he became more and more autocratic, and less democratic. Some people say this was because the nation was in such disarray after such a violent war, and difficult

- to govern, but most critics condemn Mujib's creation of Baksal, a one-party system.
- 102 Calling the coup of November 7, 1977, a coup, is itself controversial—half the population, namely the Awami League, sees this event as a coup, the other half, the BNP, would never call it a coup, but rather a kind of rescue operation by the founder of the BNP.
- 103 Uprising of the troops
- 104 The park was renamed during the Awami period in 1997 and then re-renamed again after the fall of 2001. Craftsmen who carve marble plaques may truly be the only Bangladeshis who look forward to these continual flip flops in the nomenclature of national memorials.
- 105 The rest of the victims were buried in a mass grave on the outskirts of Dhaka.
- 106 The same is true of the tomb for Zia-ul Haq in Pakistan whose body was never found after his airplane exploded in flight and his coffin is said to contain only his eye glasses and one part of his jawbone that was identified. But his mausoleum in Islamabad is impressive, whether or not it contains his corpse. And his myth lives on in the Jihadi spirit of the ISI which he nurtured.
- 107 <http://bangladesh-web.com/news/mar/28/f28032002.htm>
- 108 Crore equals 10 million.
- 109 *Daily Star*, Front Page, Wed. May 07, 2003, Volume 3 Number 1298 <http://dailystarnews.com/200305/07/n3050701.htm#BODY6>
- 110 Sufia Kamal is one of the most respected and beloved Bengali writers famous not only for her beautiful prose but inspiring writing. She has been awarded numerous literary prizes.
- 111 Anisuzzaman is one of the most prominent and respected scholars in Bangladesh and is emeritus in the Department of Bangla at Dhaka University.

- 112 "The list includes five books written by Abu Saleh, a leader of the Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha, three by Iftekhar Rasul George, owner of Nowroj Sahitya Sangsad, two by MA Motalib Akhond, four by Al Mujahidi and two each by Mahmud Shafiq and Ahmed Musa, members of the selection committee."
- 113 A lakh equals one hundred thousand, so 2.2 lakhs is 220,000.
- 114 A crore equals ten million. Taka is Bangladeshi money.
- 115 Sidelining Tagore is to be expected by the BNP/Jamaat alliance, since many members of the governing coalition were pro-Pakistani and supported the banning of Tagore during the Pakistani crackdown on Bengalee cultural identity.
- 116 These days in Bangladesh it is dangerous to do investigative journalism and several prominent journalists and scholars whose work is seen a threat to the ideology of the BNP ruling coalition were arrested on flimsy charges and subjected to torturous treatment, simply for writing and researching. This is discussed again below.
- 117 *Daily Star*, May 18, 2003.
- 118 Written by "Prof. Niser Uddin".
- 119 Dr. Khandoker Mosharraf Hossain
- 120 I repeat this quote here for literary effect and to express my own surprise that this notorious book by a very biased participant in the war would unobjectively be suggested as appropriate reading for Bangladeshi students.
- 121 See: Major Gen. Rao Farman Ali. 1992. *How Pakistan Got Divided*. Lahore.
- 122 Muntassir Mamoon. 2002. *The Vanquished Generals and the Liberation of Bangladesh*. Translated from Bengali by Kushal Ibrahim, Somoy Prokashon: Dhaka.
- 123 Muntassir Mamoon. 2002. *The Vanquished Generals and the Liberation of Bangladesh*. Translated from Bengali by Kushal Ibrahim, Somoy Prokashon: Dhaka , pg 77.

- 124 Farman Ali, as quoted by Mamoon.
- 125 Mamoon. 2002, pg. 89.
- 126 The unfavourable situation for journalists in Bangladesh since October 2001 is discussed again below.
- 127 Najam Sethi. "Leaf from Bangladesh", *The Friday Times*, January 12-18, 2001, Lahore Pakistan.
- 128 Amnesty International Press Release, 5 January 2001, AI Index ASA 13/001/2001 - News Service Nr. 3, "Bangladesh: Landmark High Court ruling against fatwas".
- 129 Arshad Mahmud (in Dhaka) BANGLADESH: The Final Edict: Religious zealots are stung to the quick as a court bans fatwas, "Outlook", January 22, 2001 (article circulated electronically).
- 130 Fundamentalist groups put a death warrant on the lives of the judges, these are the same groups now in charge of Bangladesh in a coalition government.
- 131 Ibid.
- 132 From an e-mail from a friend from Dhaka.
- 133 I've been told that at cricket matches between the India and Pakistan, Indian fans sometimes chant, "Eleven days! Eleven days! Gyaarah din! Gyaarah din!"... rubbing in the complete rout of December 1971.
- 134 Pakistani Studies for Secondary Classes, Lahore: Punjab Textbook Board, 1997, pp. 205.
- 135 Contemporary World History, A History Textbook for Class XII, Part I, Arjun Dev, Indira Arjun Dev, New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training, 1995.
- 136 An Introduction to Pakistani Studies, for Intermediate/Senior Cambridge Classes, Rabbani, M. Ikram and Sayyid, Monawwar Ali. Lahore: The Caravan Book House, 1992, pp. 319. Please note, in another chapter I have written a lengthy discussion of Pakistani textbooks.

- 137 Crisis in South Asia: A Report by Senator Edward Kennedy to the Subcommittee Investigating the Problem of Refugees and Their Settlement, Submitted to U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, November 1, 1971, US Govt. Press, pp. 66. (quoted from Bertil Lintner, *The Plights of Ethnic and Religious Minorities and the Rise of Islamic Extremism in Bangladesh*, February 2, 2003, at: [http://www.asiapacificms.com/papers/ethnic\\_and\\_religious\\_minorities\\_bangladesh.pdf](http://www.asiapacificms.com/papers/ethnic_and_religious_minorities_bangladesh.pdf))
- 138 This is reminiscent of an order implemented by the now notorious Taliban that required the few Hindus left in Kabul to wear yellow triangles to mark them as non-Muslims—just as the Jews were required to do under the Nazis.
- 139 Chowdhury, Afsan. 1998. "Disasters: Issues and Responses", in Philip Gain (ed.) *Bangladesh Environment: Facing the 21st Century*. Dhaka: Society for Environment and Human Development., quoted in: Samad, Saleem. *State of Minorities in Bangladesh: From Secular to Islamic Hegemony*, at: [http://www.mnet.fr/aiindex/ssamad\\_Bangaldesh.html](http://www.mnet.fr/aiindex/ssamad_Bangaldesh.html).
- 140 A.H. Jaffor Ullah. A divided nation after 31 years of independence, <http://bangladesh-web.com/news/mar/28/f28032002.htm>
- 141 Mushtaq, Najum. "Ideological Crossroads", *The New International*: June 10, 2001, <<http://www.jang-group.com/thenews/jun2001-daily/10-06-2001/oped/o3.htm>>.
- 142 I always replied that Bangladesh had more to fear from global warming than an attack from India.
- 143 Published in Holiday's Special Anniversary Edition October 1999. M. Rashiduzzaman has been called a collaborator and his work is considered to be apologist for Pakistani atrocities and in support of the Islamisation of Bangladesh.
- 144 Tito Scohel claims that "In 1977, all the recorded (celluloid) documents on liberation war (1952-1971) were destroyed from the FDC archive under the express order by the then

president, General Ziaur Rahman". I could not confirm this claim.

145 Half the society sees this as a great day for Bangladeshi nationalism when the military saved the fledgling country from foreign domination, the other half views it as a tragic day when the army came out of the cantonment, betraying the populist inception of the revolution, and ushering in seventeen long years of military rule. There is no objective middle road in evaluating this event.

146 Lowen, James. *The Lies My Teacher Told Me*.

147 Golden Bengal

148 Begum is a word signifying respect for an older female.

149 Unfortunately, the agreements made by the government have not been carried out and the situation continues to simmer.

150 This ordinance is now in the courts.

151 This is why Hindu communities were attacked on election day, in October 2001. The Bangladesh Human Rights Commission has documented the violence in the villages that began a few days before the election and intimidation at the polling stating against the Hindu community. This violence has not gained much international attention, though it is reported that up to half a million Hindus have been driven from their homes since the fall of 2001.

152 Literally "all locks".... Signifying that all shops will stay locked in protest.

153 I particularly dislike hartals because once while in Cox's Bazaar, I was threatened by a crowd of BNP activists with long bamboo poles who surrounded my rickshaw and barred my path. I reacted with such indignant rage, leaping from the rickshaw and cursing at them with crude expletives in my rudimentary Bengali, that they were momentarily astounded, shocked by my aggressive language, as I wildly waved my arms and screamed at them to get out of my

path. Their eyes widened in shock and they were immobilized long enough that my rickshawwallah and I had time to make our escape, but barely. Had I not been a foreign female, it might have ended more violently. Had I abandoned my rickshawwallah, he might have been murdered.

- 154 Pardon my digression into the world of Dhaka fashion, but this was something that amused me to no end... when the ladies' photos would appear in the newspapers—Hasina with her hair carefully covered, wrapped in a simple cotton sari, Khalida with her beehive hair and her bosom barely covered by a sexy silky fabric .... It was just so ironic.
- 155 Mamoon, *Vanquished Generals*, pp.80.
- 156 May 14, 2203 June 2002 issue.



This is a story about Bangladesh, a nation borne out of high ideals of brotherhood, self-determination and song. Exploring a young nation where fences and furniture are woven from wicker and bamboo from verdant plains and ancient hills reverberate with music and poetry. Yvette Claire Rosser, a passionate writer with an immeasurable curiosity, finds disturbing signs of increasing attempts, on the part of the political and religious establishment, to takeover young minds. In this seminal work, she studies the collective loss of memory in Bangladesh, orchestrated, as she finds, by years of overt military coercion and promoted by an accelerating influence of Islamisation reflected, quite glaringly, in school textbooks.

An alumnus of University of Texas at Austin, Yvette Claire Rosser is a research scholar at Observer Research Foundation.

A committed South Asian expert, she has been invited as a consultant on the subject at various forums. Implicit in her academic association with South Asia lies also a desire to study the educational structure in India per se and tangentially also its impact on curriculum in the United States. Education and South Asia are also a combined research area for Ms. Rosser who has authored several papers on the same. Religion, meta-physics and theoretical insights on a number of issues form a key referral point to a majority of Ms. Rosser's publications.

She is the author of ORF Monograph, Islamisation of Pakistani Social Studies Textbooks, published in 2003.

An educator and a scholar, Ms. Rosser remains committed to the raising of her three children. In her free time, she relaxes by working in her gardens.

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ISBN 81-291-0431-8



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